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BLACK CAT

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PERSONAL EFFICIENCY

How to Discover the Biggest Ambition of Your Life and Achieve It Quickly

By Edward Earle Purinton

The Famous Efficiency Expert

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The Black Cat

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Contents

Cover—Vivian Martin -	*Photo by Evans Studio, Los Angeles, Cal.*	
Meet Orders - - -	*Sylvester Williams* - -	3
The Fortunes of Artemus	*Madeleine Sharps Buchanan*	10
Jimmy's Souvenirs - -	*F. M. Pumphrey* - -	19
The Booze Artist - -	*Walter Vogdes* - -	24
The Shark - - -	*John Fleming Wilson* -	31
The Billet Doux - -	*Anna Brownell Dunaway*	34
One Night In St. Andrews	*Hapsburg Liebe* - -	39
The Black Cat Club -	- - - - -	42

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MEET ORDERS

By SYLVESTER WILLIAMS

When the dynamite extra rushes along through the night in violation of meet orders, the outlook is dubious for the menagerie on the circus special.

HE clock in the court house struck two.

Rogers yawned and pulled the blue light-protector from his eyes.

It was twelve years to-night since he had started railroading on the Boston & Western—twelve long, bleak years of hard work; first as a ham operator at Thornton Junction, then day telegrapher in the Boston Terminals, and finally third trick dispatcher at Brownfield.

The thick set, almost bald railwayman arose from before the long, newly varnished table with its array of clicking telegraph apparatus and black telephone arm. He stood a moment as Thornton Junction wired Riverview yard office an unimportant message; then hands in pockets he sauntered across the room, an office almost bare except for the table in the center, a few hard-bottomed chairs, a roll top desk in one corner littered with papers, a railroad map or two on the walls and a tall standard clock by the door leading into the division superintendent's quarters.

At the open window of the room Rogers sat down and gazed outside, pulling his blue alpaca coat more closely about him. The draughts of fresh, clean air of the October night carried a faint chill in their touch.

Over the trees shadowing the gray walls of the Brownfield tavern on the corner a half moon hung suspended in the flawless blue dome of the sky.

A door banged in the express office below. In the dim light of the street the dispatcher could distinguish an overalls-clad figure make its way up the hill past the hotel. He heard the muffled footfalls on the cement sidewalk for a brief interval, then they died away.

From the railway yard behind the office a switcher languidly coughed and clattered away.

The door opened from the superintendent's office. In the light of the room Rogers could make out the slender, almost youthful form of Simmonds, the division head. The face of the official looked worn and tired.

"Hey, Rogers," said Simmonds abruptly, "get that Extra 407 over the line to-night. Twenty-two cars of dynamite for Boston and the front. Here's a two page telegram from the general manager. Came in yesterday. Government must have the explosive in time to unload at Mystic Wharf, Boston, this morning. Rush order. First importance."

The division superintendent handed over a copy of a typewritten message.

"Rogers," Simmonds added, "give the 407 right of way over everything except the circus special, westbound. They got to be in Troy this morning in time to unload for the parade. Valuable stuff anyway, wild animals and the like. Is the 407 out of the yard yet?"

"They're called for one thirty," said the dispatcher. He passed to his table and picked up his train sheet. "I'll send 'em orders now to meet the 910, the circus gang."

Rogers turned, pushed a white button on the table and placed the receiver of the dispatcher's telephone to his ear.

"Hello, Riverview," he spoke into the mouthpiece. "How near's the 407 ready? Engine out? O. K. Crew all called? Good. Take this meet order. Ready?

"Extra 910 (n-i-n-e t-e-n) westbound, meets Extra 407 (f-o-u-r h-u-n-d-r-e-d

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s-e-v-e-n) eastbound at Thornton Junction, signed Simmonds. Repeat. Right, O. K. Say, who's the conductor? Shields? Engineer? Warren—good. Let the squire pull the dynamite to-night as fast as he pleases. Boys in France are waiting on the stuff.

"Riverview says they're all ready to go," said Rogers, rising and looking around at his chief.

"All right," replied the superintendent, turning towards the door to his office. He moved across the room then turned again and spoke, his hand on the door knob.

"I say, Rogers. I'm going to lie down and sleep till morning on the couch in my office. Got an investigation here at nine o'clock. If anything happens to delay that circus outfit call me. The road's under contract to get 'em into Troy in good shape in the morning. Also watch the 407. It's the most important government stuff we've handled. Good night."

Rogers saw the slender figure of the superintendent disappear into his own private office and the door shut again.

The dispatcher called Lowell and sent the Thornton Junction meet order for the 910.

For a moment longer the official remained at his desk listening to a message coming over the wire from Boston to some station down the line, then arose from his seat, crossed the floor and sat down in the window again.

The breeze from outside, even with its faint chill, seemed good on his face.

A telephone bell rang.

Rogers passed to the table once more, placed the receiver to his ear and sat down on his chair.

"Yes—Brownfield. O. K., Riverview; 407 out at two twenty. Right. Say, Riverview, were they going good? They were. Fine. Nothing else out is there before the local in the morning?" He hung up the receiver.

For a time the dispatcher sat in his chair buried in his moody reflections. He pulled out his briar pipe, filled the bowl and lighted it.

The telephone jingled again. He answered.

"Yes, Brownfield—all right, Seton. Four-seven stopped. What's the matter? Hot box on the engine? Tell the engineer to get a move on." He hung up, sat quietly for a further interval, watching the stream of white smoke from his pipe lazily ascend in the air above his desk.

The phone rang again and Afton reported the 910.

Rogers could see in his mind's eye the first section of that circus crowd shooting across Massachusetts like a fiery comet, the gaudy red and yellow circus cars enveloped in a swirl of dust and smoke.

Audilon reported the 910. They were going good, there was no mistake about that.

The dispatcher made a move to get Seton on the wire, but the phone rang and Seton reported the 407 out. "Disappeared down the yard like a fifteen inch shell."

Within half an hour Brown's Siding announced the flight of the 407.

Rogers regarded the standard clock by the door. It was evident the 910 would reach Thornton Junction long before the 407. He wrote out an order in his book, then called Abbington over the phone.

"Hello, Abbington, take a thirty-one meet order. Ready? Extra 910 (n-i-n-e t-e-n) westbound, meets 407 (f-o-u-r h-u-n-d-r-e-d s-e-v-e-n) eastbound at Tyler instead of Thornton Junction, signed Simmonds. Repeat. O. K. Say, Abbington, give it to the 407 on the fly. Don't delay. Important train. Want to get it over the road."

The dispatcher called Clark Hill, a station east of Tyler, and gave the same orders for the 910. In a short while, Clark Hill announced the train by and the order delivered. Chariton, the last station east of Tyler, notified the wire chief that the 910 had passed.

Abbington phoned flight of the 407 and reported orders delivered only to the caboose. Fireman was not on lookout on engine.

Summit, the last station west of Tyler, said that the 407 went by at three thirty-five A. M.

Rogers leaned back in his chair once more, relighting his pipe. He drummed

lazily on the table top with his fingers. He could almost see the circus extra shooting down the twenty-two mile hill from Chariton to Tyler. The mogul would careen down that snakey track in something like nineteen or twenty minutes. Once, and only once, it had been done in eighteen.

The bell on the table tinkled. Rogers answered.

"Hello—yes, Tyler. The 407! What's that you say? Once more, old man, more distinctly. The 407 by at three fifty-two; at least three hot-boxes blazing." Rogers's voice sank to a whisper. By some strange coincidence which he recalled for months afterward every telegraph sounder on the table stopped its monotonous hammer.

"Tyler—I say, Tyler! Are you sure it was the 407?"

"Positively," came back the word. "Positively; went by at seventy miles an hour. Train was like a ball of fire."

Rogers slumped back in his chair; let the phone receiver drop on his desk with a hollow bang. Perspiration stood out on his forehead in beads.

He called Tyler again.

"Hello, Tyler! I say, Tyler, just get every doctor in town over your local phone; also every nurse. Extra 910 is already on the Chariton Hill, westbound, the 407 eastbound by your station in violation of orders. I'll get the wrecker started from Riverview immediately."

Rogers hung up. He regarded the back of his hands. They gleamed with beads of sweat. The room felt stuffy and hot.

The dispatcher called Riverview on the phone and ordered out the wrecking crew, then let the receiver drop from his hand. He could still hear the voice of Riverview in the receiver talking.

What was the mater with the 407? His orders were correct. Abbington had reported delivery. Had the train crew forgotten?

Rogers shoved back his chair, stood up and gazed about him. He half expected to see a crowd of men at his elbow. He crossed the room. His footfalls sounded hollow and empty on the wooden floor. Through the window came the sound of the town clock striking the hour. The moon had gone down. The branches of the elms by the Tavern rustled softly. A door banged again in the express house.

The dispatcher shuddered. Down Chariton Hill, down that twisting tortuous twenty miles, he knew a train was racing with a roar like Niagara. Coming from the opposite direction was a giant mogul, flying like the wind, dragging behind a long string of box cars loaded with dynamite. He could see the body of Warren leaning far out of the cab, gazing around the short curves. Like a meteor, an oil headlight would flicker a fitful second before the engineer's eyes. A black monster would leap into his engine from the night. There would be a blinding flash, a scalding flow of water and steam, a dull rumble as the dynamite went up, and the right of way for miles would be one confused mass of splintered cars and still bodies.

Rogers pulled his alpaca coat close. His body was freezing cold. He steadied himself a moment, turned, entered the superintentent's office. He pushed in the light switch.

Simmonds, throwing a blanket from his body, started up from the couch. His collar and tie lay to one side on the floor.

Rogers looked at his chief for a moment in silence. His tone when he spoke seemed very far away and unreal.

"Mr. Simmonds, the 407 and the 910 are both on Chariton Hill. I ordered out the wrecker from Riverview."

"KEELY foe—the widow wore a ring on her thumb."

A white waybill slipped from the conductor's fat hand, slid along the smooth, yellow surface of the desk and went fluttering to the caboose floor.

Conductor Shields, his ponderous body comfortably domiciled in a spacious swivel chair, hesitated a moment in checking up the bills for his train, pulled up the lamp shade and cast his eyes downward. In the yellow glow of the oil lamp flooding the interior of the caboose he could see the waybill on the floor beside the stove. The conductor eyed the slippery piece of paper

for a brief second, then went back to his work at his desk.

"Keely foe—the widow wore a ring on her thumb," he sang.

The caboose door banged with a jar which rattled the pans in the locker under the monitor. A blonde-haired youth of a flagman in overalls wearing a black stiff hat appeared from the semi-darkness along the hack and stood blinking at the conductor.

"I say, Ikey. Guess who the bloomin' blazes is haulin' us to-night? Squire Warren."

The flagman stooped, picked up the waybill from the floor and handed it to the conductor.

"How much of a train, Ikey?" The youth drew a packet of cigarettes from his overalls, lighted one and flung the burning match squarely through the red curtains into a berth usually occupied by the conductor.

The round face of Shields turned and his watery eyes lanquidly regarded the match; it smouldered for a brief instant on the newest coverlet his wife had made for him and went out.

"Keely foe—the widow wore a ring on her thumb."

"How much of a train, Ikey?" persisted the youth.

"You the conductor?" Shields asked without looking up.

"Nope, but the squire wants to know."

Shields stopped turning the waybills and regarded his flagman.

"What the hell is the squire sending word back here for? Ain't the yardmaster around?"

"Don't know," was the reply.

The fat railwayman sniffed the air with his short, pug nose. He had as little respect for his youthful flagman, one Charles Smith, as he had love for Squire Warren, the engineer.

The flagman shook the ashes down in the caboose stove, opened the door and threw in a shovelful of hard coal. When that act was accomplished he pulled two tail lights from their resting place on the monitor, opened both up, and stuck a match to their wicks; then after closing the shutters on the sides, he took a lantern on each arm, passed to the rear platform, hung one on either side of the caboose and came back again.

He regarded the blink-eyed conductor studying the air gauge above his desk. The red indicator on the gauge was steadily mounting up the white figured dial.

"The engine's on," said Shields, making a pile out of his bills and standing up. "The air's pumpin' up. We've got to move to-night. Be in Boston by daylight."

The conductor reached for a tattered, brown coat on a nail inside his bunk, pulled this on and picked up a lantern from the floor.

"You comin' to look over the air?" sniffed the brains of the train.

The flagman winked one eye at his superior.

"It ain't my job. Let the head shack take a walk."

The conductor with a grunt rolled down the hack to the door and passed outside.

In a few minutes the conductor's huge form passed by the gangway of the engine. In the cab a gaunt visaged engineer looked down on the conductor in austere silence.

"Hey, Ikey."

A brakeman dropped from the engine to the ground and held out a roll of white tissue-paper orders to Shields.

"Here you are, Ikey."

The conductor held his lantern under the small of his arm, took the orders and regarded the writing.

"Meet the 910 Thornton Junction," he read half aloud. "Four seven run extra Riverview to Boston."

"Say," spoke the brakeman. "Operator says to be sure and tell you dispatcher wants you to wheel 'em like hell to-night."

"Sonny," said the chief without looking up. "Just you turn 'em up ahead like Boston was heaven and the gates closin' at daylight. You only got twenty-two cars of dynamite."

"What?" asked the brakeman.

"Dynamite."

"Whew!"

"If we should—"

"Well you won't. Keep trottin' and

nothin' will shake down the ashes for us in the hack stove. Highball. Get the switch, Buddy."

The head shack disappeared down the track swinging his lantern for the train to move.

But there was no movement in the cab of the 407. The fireboy lay fast asleep, doubled up on his seat. Warren, his long thin legs cocked up on the boiler end, quietly gazed out at the half moon throwing into relief the rows of box cars in the terminal.

The conductor swung his light and grunted.

There was not a sign from the dark cab. The air pump beat a heavy tatoo on the engine side; the blower purred quietly.

"I say," came the squeaky voice of the conductor. It was the first time in two years he had spoken to Warren. "I say, are you dreamin' of your mother-in-law's funeral or are you too scared to leave the yard with that explosive behind? I say, ain't you alive?"

The engineer shifted on his seat, opened the throttle and the train got under way.

"I say," mimicked Warren in the piping tones and accent of Shields, "ain't you got sense enough to ride the hack and stay there. Look out, you porpoise, you don't get left."

Warren yanked the throttle out, sending sparks from the stack fifty feet into the air; the 407 went clattering out on the main line.

Gaining speed with the passage of every rail length, the freight passed by Shields waiting beside the track; but with an agility unbelievable in a man of his corpulence the conductor swung himself onto the rear platform of the caboose and stood a moment watching the switch lights in the Riverview yard fade into the night.

Shields passed inside the car and looked around for his flagman. He found him quietly snoozing in the cupola, and pinched him on the leg.

"Hey there. You goin' to sleep to Boston?"

Smith stretched himself and pushed up his hat.

"Wasn't asleep, Ikey. Just tired."

The ponderous railwayman gazed at his flagman for a minute in disgusted silence.

"I'll be damned. You ain't done nothin' this trip but hang out two tail lights. No fresh drinkin' water brought in, no coal. You ain't swept out for a week."

The conductor set his light down in the aisle and started towards his desk.

The floor of the caboose had by now begun to rise and decline in a most alarming fashion. Faster and faster sped the dynamite extra. A telegraph office flashed by with such rapidity that the din of the caboose passing was a shriek.

The sallow faced flagman slid down from the cupola and felt his way along behind the conductor to the locker opposite the stove.

"I say," shouted the conductor studying the air guage. "What if the bloomin' box cars should leave the iron with that dynamite?"

Smith's jaw dropped with a comical jerk.

"How fast, Ikey?" yelled the trainman.

"God knows. Ninety miles at least."

The caboose lurched giddily, upsetting the three chairs in the car; cushions and chairs rolled down the floor. On a sharp curve the lamp on the wall above the desk crashed to the floor and went out.

In the semi-darkness the car gave another wild swing in the opposite direction; the flagman flew like a bullet across the open space. His head struck dully on the edge of the conductor's desk; he sank into a crumpled up heap among the bits of broken glass from the lamp chimney. Shields uttered a wild shout as if he were trying to tell the engineer what had happened; he pulled the conductor's valve on the wall viciously open; the train came to a sudden dizzy halt.

In the quiet, after the roar of many cars, the flagman moaned and rolled over.

Shields hastily grabbed a lantern from behind the monitor; taking a half-filled can of stale drinking water from the ice chest, he began pouring a heavy stream over the sallow face below. With a curse and wild gurgle of water in his nose and throat, Smith sat up.

"In the name—of—Holy Moses," the youth snorted, his overalls dripping with

water. "Couldn't you use common sense? I ain't a dead man."

"You ain't dead?"

"Naw."

Smith stood up, wiped the water from his eyes, felt of his head. A great welt testified to the speed with which he had struck the desk.

The caboose door banged. The spare figure of Warren, carrying a lighted torch in his hand, strode from the darkness behind the monitor.

"Agnes of Hanover Square's black cat," ejaculated Smith, staring at the engineer. "What you doin' back here?"

"Who pulled the air?" demanded Warren, waving his smoking torch. "Who pulled the air on me in Seton? The operator and whole division up ahead are asking. Who pulled the air, I say?"

Shield's fat eyes half bulged from their sockets.

"Who the hell are you?" the conductor demanded, his stubby nose quivering like a twig in a windstorm. "I pulled the air—I'm the conductor. Out of this hack on the run. Out with him, Smithy."

The flagman stood as still as if he were a piece of chiseled statuary. Shields grabbed the lank engineer by the collar of his overalls, hustled him down the aisle, pushed the wildly cursing Warren out on the platform and assisted him to the cinder ballast below by a kick which landed where it should have landed.

"Now go ahead and get in your engine and go to Boston," fairly howled Shields shaking his fist in his rage at the amazed engineer on the ground. "Go to Boston now and if you stop once I'll pull you off the engine and shake you into a piece of tattered overalls."

When Warren arrived back on the 407 again he heaved with suppressed rage, and for want of a better excuse reported to the Seton operator that the cause of the stop was a hot-box.

With a yank and rattle of draw-bars which raised Smith a good half foot from the floor, the train got under way again. The last switch lights of the little yard of Seton dropped behind in a vast cloud of smoke and dust.

"The squire's leggin' it," yelled the flagman.

The conductor examined the air gauge and held on to a piece of the monitor. If the hack had seemed to rise and fall like a rudderless ship in a blow before, now it began to jump about like a row boat in a channel gale. Faster and faster turned the wheels. A station went by, a thin streak of light.

Shields took a lantern in his hand and pulled his hat over his ears. "I'll fix the fool," he shouted to his companion employee. "I'll set hand brakes on the last ten cars. If I don't we'll all be in heaven in a half hour. If that dynamite—"

But the conductor's words were drowned in the howl of the train. With an effort he went to the front door of the caboose; he opened this, passed to the platform and mounted to the roof. It was an utter impossibility to walk upright in the typhoon of smoke and cinders which swept the top of the cars.

Shields half crawled, half dragged himself with his lantern towards a brake wheel and began desperately to twist this up. Down below, as the brake shoes bit into the wildly spinning wheels, a long trail of sparks shot backwards in the dust laden air.

A town flashed by in the darkness. Shields on top, his eyes filled with hot cinders, had not the least idea what it was.

He worked forward to another car and set a tight brake; with as much painstaking difficulty and precision as if he were walking a tight wire above Niagara he worked his away over still another swaying roof. The brakes now binding began somewhat to slacken the wild race of the dynamite train.

Seizing a grab iron the conductor leaned over the edge of a box car and looked down. The side of the freight extra was lighted up by a brilliant scarlet glare; a pair of hot boxes blazed on the third or fourth head car.

A sudden terror shot through Shields's mind. What if fire should get into the dynamite?

The conductor made up his mind to take no chances. Crawling along the tops of

the cars with a rapidity which on a sharp curve nearly sent him flying into the air, Shields made his way back along the wooden running board. As he began the descent of the back ladder a town flashed by; he caught a fleeting glimpse of houses on a hill; he knew it was Tyler.

The train passed the last switch east of Tyler and sailing rapidly into the darkness caught the grade up Chariton Hill. When the conductor reappeared in the caboose, wiping smoke and cinders from his eyes, he beheld his flagman crouched on a locker seat.

"I say," yelled the conductor. "If we don't get this fool ahead stopped we'll be in heaven in ten minutes. There's already blazin' hot-boxes."

For the second time that night Shields caught the air brake on the wall in a big paw; it came over sharply. With an abruptness which bunched all the chairs up again in a pile Extra 407 came to a dead halt.

Smith stuck his head out of the caboose window.

"Where are we?" asked the conductor.

"'Bout four miles east of Tyler," drawled the flagman looking about at his surroundings.

"Get out a red light behind," snorted the conductor. The head of the train grabbed a hand lantern and started outside.

Smith, after watching the broad back of his superior disappear in the doorway, stepped yawning to the back platform and leisurely lighted and dropped a fusee which threw a brilliant crimson glow over the trees and track. The flagman came inside, sailed his hat into a dark corner of the dimly lighted caboose, then slowly climbed into a trainman's bunk and quietly went to sleep.

"If they can't see our tail lights, they ought to be pulled out of service," he murmured, passing into slumberland.

Up ahead, Shields waddled along the track the length of the train, looking over the smoking axle ends. Once or twice he stopped to open smouldering boxes, which caused the waste inside to flame. By the time he arrived at the engine it was evident that the speed of the 407 had been so great that five or six cars were running hot.

A few feet beyond the engine the conductor saw the points and frog of a deserted siding used by work trains on the hill during the day.

"Say, Buddy," he called to his head brakeman. "Just get the switch there. We'll pull in here and let the train cool off for a half hour."

The brakeman threw the switch and the 407 rapidly pulled into clear on the siding.

Shields remained standing by the track as the freight went by. When the caboose passed over the switch points, the conductor threw the lever back and running along behind caught the platform of the hack and went inside.

As he did so a long train of red and yellow circus cars swirled by on the main going down the hill. Shields leaned far out of the caboose window to see two tail lights go out of sight around a curve.

"Sufferin' cats!" exclaimed the conductor, his lantern dropping from his nerveless hand to the wooden floor with a bang. "I'm either loony or not alive. We never had any meet order with that train."

The conductor crossed the car and shook the sleeping form of his flagman.

"Hey—hey!" yelled the conductor. "Did you get any meet orders on the fly for a circus train while I was on top windin' up binders?"

The trainman sat up and stuck a hand down an overalls pocket. He pulled out a roll of train orders.

"There you are, Ikey. Forgot all about them. Got them on the hoop as we went by Abbington."

Shields unrolled the tissue-paper wad which Smith handed over.

"Extra 910 westbound meets Extra 407 eastbound, at Tyler instead of Thornton Junction," he read.

"My God!" fairly yelled the conductor, dancing with excitement. "There ain't no question this time. Next trip I go out there's going to be a new flagman on this caboose."

"Cheese it, Ikey," came sleepily from the bunk. "Cheese that noise. What's the odds as long as they got by?"

THE FORTUNES OF ARTEMUS

By MADELEINE SHARPS BUCHANAN

Misfortune's slapstick confronts Artemus at every turn, as he runs the gantlet in the corridors of his apartment house, clad in pajamas and dressing gown.

R. ARTEMUS Appleby awoke luxuriously to the glorious knowledge that it was Thanksgiving Day.

It is possible that this did not mean so much to anyone else in all New York as it did to the round faced, blue eyed, forty-four year old Artemus Appleby, dabbler in real estate and anything else that came along. At present Mr. Appleby had exactly thirty-eight dollars and fifty-four cents in the bank where his account was wont to swell and decrease with the rapidity and uncertainty of the waves of the sea.

Mr. Appleby owed many bills and yesterday had paid a goodly sum for a pair of perfect gray trousers to be worn with his nobby black coat. Those trousers—ah! They had set Mr. Appleby back to the thirty-eight dollars and fifty-four cents, but they were worth it.

He rolled over lazily and smiled, a sort of cherubic anticipation in his baby blue eyes. For he had brought the trousers home himself and had paraded proudly in them for an hour before the glass in his closet door.

"A perfect gray, sir, the newest thing worn," the strange tailor had assured him.

He had been a strange tailor because Mr. Appleby owed, as we believe we remarked, many bills. Mrs. Harnby Ellis, a widow reputed to be worth over a hundred thousand dollars had invited Mr. Artemus Appleby to her Thanksgiving week-end party in New Rochelle. For months he had angled for an introduction to this dark and unfortunately skinny, but infinitely desirable heiress, and now that their friendship was a matter of eight weeks or so Mr. Appleby, to his delirious joy, realized that the rather sharp tongued widow preferred him to her other suitors, and he determined to settle the matter upon this momentous house party.

Hence the perfect gray trousers and Mr. Appleby's waking delight, born of the knowledge that the day had arrived.

Mr. Appleby put forth one plump hand and lifted his flat watch from the top of the tiny table where reposed his vacuum bottle and glass and last night's paper.

It was nine o'clock. His train left at twelve-fifty.

Let him hasten. To-day, if ever, his toilette must be perfect. With a blissful sigh Mr. Appleby rolled out of bed in his pale blue and white pajamas, snatched his faded yellow bath robe from a chair back and sallied forth to his bath. Thoughts of the widow and her bank account now and then brought a smile to his round face, and when he emerged he was pinker than ever.

He would take another look at those trousers by daylight. It was possible the gray was not so perfect away from the evening light By jove, he hadn't thought of that! Dragging his dressing gown more securely about him Mr. Appleby trotted into the little room off his bedroom where the night before he had laid out carefully the two suits he owned beside the new trousers he had himself carried home, and the shirts and socks that were to go into the big black suitcase he had left open on the couch.

A blast of cold air struck him as he entered and he hastened to close the window which opened on the fire escape.

Then he paused, perplexed. He had not opened that window.

A second later his round bewildered eyes beheld the ruin of all his hopes. For suit-

case, shirts, socks, perfect grays and all of Mr. Artemus Appleby's belongings had vanished, positively were not there!

Mr. Appleby's pink mouth fell open; the color drifted from his face; he began to tremble, for there before him, most carefully spread out upon the couch, lay his pink silk pajamas, also destined for the house party, and a leaf taken from a very much soiled note book.

With bulging eyes Mr. Appleby read:

"These gray pants are SOME! I hates to leave a guy wid nuttin to wear, so I'm lettin' youse have dese pretty pink tings. Many tanks, but I wisht youse wasn't so blamed fat."

Save for the pretty pink things the room was empty of clothes, and so was Mr. Appleby's apartment.

For a long time his wardrobe had been decreasing with his bank account.

His knees gave way and he sat down weakly on the sofa.

The thing was more than a misfortune to Mr. Appleby; it was a tragedy. Even a thief must have pitied him as he sat there huddled in the faded dressing gown, gazing helplessly about the familiar room. What was he to do? Not only now, but all the days to come? He had an idea that Mrs. Harnby Ellis would never forgive him.

And most certainly he could not go to New Rochelle in blue and white pajamas and a faded dressing gown.

Three friends there were he might have helped him out. Two were even now dressing for the house party, and these two had for days been plainly jealous of Mr. Appleby's success with the wealthy widow.

Would he tell them? Never! Not if he went trouserless to an early grave.

The other friend—ah! Mr. Appleby sat up with a faint return of the cherubic smile.

The other, one Jeremy Todd, lived two floors above him. Jerry was almost Mr. Appleby's build, and a good scout.

He would hie him to Jerry ere that good soul went out.

The telephone was a dash of cold water to Mr. Appleby's sudden enthusiasm, for Mr. Todd did not answer. But then Jerry Todd was given to sleeping late and remarkably sound, and Mr. Appleby had no doubt that he was doing so at the moment.

But what to do? The Desdemona possessed no bell boys, and the elevator stopped running on holidays. Mr. Appleby was unacquainted with any of the other tenants. Another brilliant idea! He would wear his overcoat over the pajamas and dressing gown and visit Mr. Todd.

Mr Appleby possessed, or should have, at the present date, one very warm, very prosperous looking overcoat, double breasted and belted. He proceeded to don under garments, socks and shoes. Luckily he had stuffed his socks in his shoes and the shoes under his bed when he retired the night before! Then he assumed once more the pajamas and dressing gown. Finally he approached the closet where hung his overcoat, in fear and trembling.

Mr. Appleby's advance had much the appearance of a prowling thief or a scouting Indian. And when he flung open the closet door the famous sensations of Mother Hubbard were as nothing to his. The slim burglar had done his work well. This time there was not even a note. Nothing but space!

Mr. Appleby stood before that empty closet, a short, stout, pathetic figure with murder in his soul.

After a moment however, he braced up a bit, took a reef in the cords and tassels that, thank Heaven, were still left to him, and opened cautiously the door into the hall.

Two merry young things in furs were descending the stairs and Mr. Appleby scurried back again, much like a timid pink rabbit. When he once more ventured forth the hall was apparently empty, whereupon, clutching his key in his damp left hand, Mr. Appleby began his tortuous ascent to the apartments of Mr. Jeremy Todd.

After hours of darting behind things, scurrying down one corridor and up another, Mr. Appleby at last reached his goal.

Had Mr. Todd been at home and not off on a merry little automobile party for the day, this story would not have been told.

But Mr. Todd was not at home and Mr. Appleby could not have gotten into his a-

partment in a thousand years. As the frightful truth began to dawn upon him, Mr. Appleby became a bit excited and made rather more noise at the door of Mr. Todd than he perhaps realized. A door opened down the corridor and a shrill female voice called:

"George! Get up and see what all this racket is! You might as well get up anyhow, for you've got to go! Mama'll have a fit if you— Good land, WHAT is going on? Get up and find out!"

Mr. Appleby had no desire to see George. He gathered his dressing gown high above his knees and ran blindly in the direction of the staircase. As he fled his heart seemed to outrun his feet. And galloping along at this headlong pace he passed, flittingly, as an express dashes by a telegraph pole, a tall, gaunt female with her scant hair in curlers and a scarlet kimono clutched at her breast. This individual, upon seeing Mr. Appleby, flung both hands in the air and shrieked wildly. It lifted the fugitive's thin hair, that shriek, and caused him to fall helplessly into a nook formed by a doorway and which he trusted would screen him for a moment from all pursuers.

Alas, the door against which he leaned was not even latched, and it precipitated Mr. Appleby with no warning whatever into a small square room, where he sat down heavily and most unexpectedly upon the unresponsive head of a tigerskin rug.

Stunned for a moment, Mr. Appleby watched dully a long, slim hand reach out from somewhere and close and lock the door; heard with indifferent, singing ears the red-kimonoed female and a person he fancied was George, gallivanting about the hall outside.

For the moment it mattered not to Mr. Artemus Appleby what day it was, and the memory of the Widow Ellis and the perfect gray trousers slipped entirely from his mind.

This blissful state endured but for a short space of time, however, and then with freshly dawning horror Mr. Appleby became conscious by degrees of the gracious being who leaned carelessly against the locked door and smiled down upon him.

Mr. Appleby began at the small black pumps, traveled slowly up the worn but very stylish blue serge gown, reached the V of white, full throat, the broad linen collar and came at last to the smile.

Eventually he noted the merry gray eyes, the low, serene brow and the coronet of dusky hair, but at present he was completely taken up with the smile.

"How do you do?" said the laughing lips.

It struck Mr. Appleby that it was a trifle ridiculous for him to reply, "How do you do?" clothed, or rather unclothed as he was, and seated upon the most uncomfortable head of her tigerskin rug. So he struggled awkwardly to his feet, gathering the flapping dressing gown tightly about him.

"How in the dev—er—the world did I get in here?" he groaned.

"You—dropped in," nodded his hostess demurely. "What was the trouble?"

Mr. Appleby noted the brow and the eyes and the hair then and a slow red mounted to his own. He began hesitantly with the perfect gray trousers and ended with the awful female in the red kimono who had evidently roused George and started pursuit. He mentioned the house party but neglected to speak of the wealthy and desirable widow. Inwardly, however, he was groaningly contrasting her with this merry-eyed, wholly charming person in worn blue serge.

When he reached the end of his miseries the face he was confusedly eyeing broke into a delightful riot of dimples and curves; now she did more than smile; she sat down upon a low ottoman and laughed.

Mr. Appleby took another hitch in the dressing gown and glanced timidly around. The room was furnished poorly but cosily, and on the center table he noted a pound of coffee, a loaf of bread and a can of tomato soup.

"You were fortunate to have an invitation somewhere on Thanksgiving Day," said the low pleasant voice when it had mastered its mirth. "Even if you can't go, you've had it. I've been here a month and don't know a soul. I work on a newspaper. Your red-kimonoed female is rather dreadful. She eats lunch where I do."

At that moment a sharp knock on the

door caused Mr. Appleby to make a wild motion toward the tigerskin, and then to slink behind a screen that concealed a doorway.

But the lady of the rooms was quite equal to any emergency.

"Who is it?" she called and the voice of the red-kimonoed one replied.

"Miss Brown, I just knocked to warn you. There's a man running around the house without all his clothes on! We don't know where he is now, but you'd better watch out and don't open your door to anybody. He looked crazy to me."

"My goodness! All right—thank you!" replied Miss Brown.

"Now, my friend, if the coast is clear, don't you think you'd better go?"

Mr. Appleby emerged from behind the screen with almost tearful gratitude.

"Can't thank you, Miss Brown," he muttered. "You're a good sport. My name's Appleby, Artemus Appleby, fourth floor. Going to eat Thanksgiving dinner all alone here?"

"Yes," said Miss Brown with twinkling eyes. "Tomato soup, cold ham and the fixings. I don't send my money home to mother, haven't any; nor am I paying off the mortgage on the dear old farm. I just don't get enough to eat, live and dress on right, and as I have to do a bit of all, the dollars have to stretch."

Mr. Appleby felt an immediate sympathy with this gracious being. As he edged toward the door he experienced a sudden lessening of his heretofore consuming desire to be one of Mrs. Ellis's house party, and a mad and of course utterly impossible idea grew in his befuddled brain.

"Thanks awfully," he managed to stammer. "If I—get a pair of—er—get some clothes, may I see you later?"

Miss Brown smiled sociably.

"Oh, yes, I'll be here consuming the ham and the soup."

And like a pale yellow and white rubber ball, Mr. Appleby bounced into the fortunately deserted corridor. Deserted, yes, but there were alarming sounds of life all around.

A victrola was playing busily in a nearby apartment; doors closed and muffled voices and laughter now and then reached Mr. Appleby. He cast a distracted glance back at the haven he had just left, and took the final plunge into the steep chasm of the staircase.

The trip down was quite as full of thrills as the trip up had been, with the difference that Mr. Appleby now knew all the corners which had shielded him before and at each approaching step or voice he sought one and crouched in it. He felt that by now he was a hunted man.

At last he came within sight of his own door, and unclutching his cramped fingers he smiled down blissfully upon his key. There, at least, was shelter and decency!

Let him stay there, mealless if need be, until the shops opened on the morrow and that good-for-nothing ass of a Jeremy Todd returned.

Ah! Mr. Appleby drew back and crouched in the shadow of a doorway. Before his own door stood Larry Alan, one of the three friends he might have counted upon had he, too, not been interested in the widow; Larry Alan and the Hawksbys, the last people on earth Mr. Appleby desired at present to see.

"Goodness me!" Mrs. Hawksby was saying in her high, sweet voice. "Where can the man be? He might have known we'd stop for him in the car!"

"I don't half like it," said Larry Alan, drawing back and taking a half squint at the door. "Good old Art always looked apoplectic to me. Suppose he's in there—"

Mrs. Hawksby gave a faint scream.

"Oh, don't! How can you! I shall faint!"

Mr. Hawksby looked serious, while back in the shadows the round pink mouth of Mr. Appleby dropped slowly open. Apoplectic—he'd settle with Larry Alan later!

What ailed the fools? Why didn't they go on?

"I'll go down and telephone Mrs. Ellis," volunteered Mr. Hawksby at last. "Maybe he's stolen a march on us and gone ahead, and maybe if he can't go he's called her up and told her."

"Can't go!" chuckled Mr. Alan sarcastically. "He's been lying awake nights planning how he could get asked. But that's a good idea, go ahead."

In the shade of the friendly doorway Mr. Appleby doubled a fat pink fist. If he ever got any clothes there would be murder done!

The interval of Mr. Hawksby's absence was amply filled in by Mrs. Hawksby's hysterical voice supplicating Mr. Appleby to please, please come out, and by Mr. Alan's loud and repeated assaults on his door and insistent and noisy calls upon his name. Mr. Appleby shivered, feeling certain that all the world would soon be gathered at his doorway.

Ah! A door opened on the left and a stout woman clothed for the street emerged. "What in the world is the trouble?" she asked.

Mrs. Hawksby excitedly explained, and just then Mr. Hawksby returned with the news that Mrs. Ellis had said she had had no word from Mr. Appleby. The stout woman, on her own way to a Thanksgiving dinner, refused to remain and swell the crowd.

"Pooh!" she snorted. "The man's stepped out somewhere and will meet you at the train. No use gettin' all worked up about that. Bachelors are always queer ducks, can't depend on 'em nohow, and after forty they just ain't rational."

Mr. Appleby looked after her retreating form and chuckled. Mr. Alan was also forty, decidedly.

"My!" said Mrs. Hawksby. "What a queer woman!"

Mr. Alan merely snorted and gave his friend's door a last kick for luck.

"I don't like the look of it," he repeated gloomily. "I feel we ought to get in."

"Bust the lock?" suggested Mr. Hawksby cheerfully.

"Yes, no hope by the transom; it's shut tight."

"Where is the janitor?" asked Mrs. Hawksby. "Isn't there one? Somebody get him. I feel that poor Mr. Appleby is dead."

Poor Mr. Appleby felt almost so himself. He continued to shiver. Good heavens, what fools! Why, he might have gone anywhere as the fat woman had said! Why break in a man's door because he didn't answer a knock? He'd never heard of such a thing. Asinine, perfectly asinine of Alan. Apoplectic! Rot!

The janitor at length arrived, a husky individual of dusky hue, who apparently possessed a past, and most decidedly a fist and a jaw.

"I kin bust dis here lock in a minute," he said disgustedly. "But he ain't here, he ain't. Why has he gotta be daid in there jest because he ain't openin' de do'?"

Mr. Appleby agreed heartily with the pugilistic janitor. Why, indeed?

"Now, my man, we have our reasons for being worried," said Mr. Alan soothingly, "just you go ahead and get in if you can."

And to this day Mr. Appleby cannot tell how it was done for he could not see much from his happily secluded corner, but the dusky, husky janitor went ahead and got in, somehow.

Mrs. Hawksby, protesting hysterically that she knew they would come upon poor Mr. Appleby's dead body, remained by the open door and refused to enter. Her husband joined her presently.

"Looks queer even yet," he told her. "Art's clothes are gone; not a stitch in the place but a pair of pink pajamas. Odd where the old boy is, isn't it?"

"Told you you wouldn't find nothin'," growled the janitor. "Busted in dat do' for nothin', too. He's went out, he has and he'll tell you all so. Ain't no cause to go breakin' up de house jest cause a gent's got a red face and is fat."

Well, Mr. Appleby thought, if he remained concealed much longer he would have a pretty fair idea of what the world thought of him. Apoplectic, not rational, red faced, FAT!

Fetching picture, very! Was that how he had appeared to HER when he burst backward into her apartment and sat ungracefully upon the hard head of her tigerskin rug?

Irrational, perhaps, yes, but—the rest?

Mr. Appleby squirmed. What a position for a modest man!

Happily Mrs. Hawksby discovered at that moment that they had just about time to catch the twelve-fifty if they hurried.

Mr. Appleby had not had a chance to note the time, although with remarkable precaution he had put his watch and his ten dollar bill in the pocket of his dressing gown when he started out to enlist the services of Jeremy Todd. He made sure at this moment that he still had them, and felt that from now on he would go about with his belongings, if he ever possessed any more, padlocked to his heels.

But at last they were gone, the janitor muttering that he wasn't "goin' ter be 'sponsible fo' dat dar open do', no, sah!" and Alan and Hawksby reassuring him all the way down the stairs.

With a prodigious sigh the hunted one emerged from his shelter and made a wild and reckless dash for that unlocked door.

The key in his fat, moist hand was useless, now, but at least— Alas! Was he never to reach his goal? Upon its very threshold a strong hand fell on the collar of the yellow dressing-gown and Mr. Appleby stood perfectly still for a moment, and then he turned his paling face slowly about until he met the full gaze of a pair of narrow black eyes, which held a twinkle away back in them somewhere.

"What's the idea?" asked his captor sociably. "Been makin' a devil of a time, haven't you?"

Light dawned upon Mr. Appleby.

"Say," he quavered, "are you George?"

"George Lee is my name. Why?" The remorseless hand still held Mr. Appleby firmly.

"Come on in here," said Mr. Appleby. "I'm sick of being out in the hall. My name's Appleby, Artemus Appleby, and I'll tell you all about it. And, anyhow, your pants—er—your clothes ought to about fit me, George."

Mr. Lee's face was an interesting study.

"I'll come along in," he nodded, "but I guess you're ravin' a bit, eh, old top? What's the trouble?"

Once seated upon the edge of his very own bed in his very own room Mr. Appleby drew a long, blissful breath and beginning with the perfect gray trousers and leaving out only the Widow Ellis's fortune he unburdened his harassed soul to Mr. Lee, whose mouth fell slowly open as he proceeded, and who brought down a fat hand on a plump knee when he finished.

"By gosh, I never heard anything like it!" he guffawed. "You look like Nero at the burning of Rome! Had some morning of it, haven't you? You ought to be in the movies, Appleby!

"I've gotta suit I'll lend you if—" Here he paused and regarded Mr. Appleby with the light of a great idea breaking upon his good natured face. "Say, Appleby, I'll help you if you'll help me," he proceeded. "You see, it's this way. I was on my way out when I ran upon you just now, and of course if I get some clothes I've got to go back. And of course, too, I can't leave you like this, it wouldn't be human. Well, my wife drags me to her mother's every holiday and out there they hate me like poison, and treat me accordingly. I'm just crazy about going. They've got the dough, you see, and I haven't, and let me tell you, that's the devil of a mistake for a man to make."

Here Mr. Appleby squirmed.

"There's a neat little dinner being given in Tom Green's apartment, lower floor, and I'm due at that. I was making my getaway when I found you. Now, if you'll help me, I'll go and get you some clothes."

"Sure, I'll help," Mr. Appleby struggled in mental darkness peopled with awful visions. "But I won't have to—have to go out in the hall again, will I?"

"Not till you're dressed. Wait here now until I come back."

Mr. Appleby waited. He waited blissfully, twiddling his thumbs, and then he glanced lovingly at his ten dollar bill. Roseate visions were taking form in his active brain.

Presently with a shamefaced grin he telephoned Mrs. Harnby Ellis that he was absolutely desolated, but the cruel fact remained that he would have to miss her house party.

Why? Oh, a man had telephoned him from his club, that morning (he was at his club now), a very, very important man to Mr. Appleby in a business way. Mrs. Ellis could understand that, of course, she so ably managed her own business affairs. No, he could not catch a later train or

promise for a later day. The man was a stranger in town, had not been expected for days, and there was important business to transact. Mrs. Ellis understood?

Most unfortunate, most!

Mr. Appleby gently replaced the receiver and sat down, gazing upon the instrument in a kind of pensive peace. How could he ever have contemplated living in hourly reach of that thin, carrying voice? Let him be everlastingly thankful that the perfect gray of those brand new trousers had tickled the slim burglar's fancy.

Now, if George would only get a move on with a few presentable clothes—George, by the way, was a very well dressed man!—life would once more hold possibilities for Mr. Appleby, rosy ones, that coming a bit late, were all the rosier.

Fate appeared to have tired of playing with him, for in a few more wearing moments Mr. George Lee appeared, and over his arm there hung a very good looking blue suit; clothing for the gods, or from the gods, Mr. Appleby was not sure which, but he felt that this glorious raiment which he saw approaching was like no other that had ever been.

Mr. Lee made a stealthy entrance. He walked backward upon his toes and glanced with an alarming apprehension up the stairs down which he had come. Once within Mr. Appleby's apartment he slammed the door with a loud breath of relief and a wide grin.

"Gosh, thought my wife would see me sure," he said, and wiped his brow with a blue bordered handkerchief.

The thought of Mr. Lee's wife produced no tremor in Mr. Appleby's peaceful breast. Decent covering for a fairly stout man of forty-four was within reach and Mr. Appleby grabbed it.

"George," he said tearfully, "I shall never forget this."

A few moments later Mr. Appleby stood before his closet door, clothed and in his right mind. The cherubic smile was again upon hs lips. "They fit," he said dreamily, "like my own."

"Yeh," assented Mr. Lee with vague interest. "But come on now, you've got to help me out."

"How?" Mr. Appleby emerged from his dream with a jolt. "Just tell me how."

"You see, it's this way," began his deliverer. "I told you I didn't want to go to my mother-in-law's, and by heck, I ain't going! I told you that?"

Mr. Appleby nodded. "You did. You said—"

"Never mind. I ain't going, that's all, and there's a party on the first floor I am going to. But I didn't tell Elvira I wasn't going with her; gosh, no! But she's kind of suspected and had an eye on me all day. Well, when I got back in the apartment after chasing you I got an idea. So after a while I got up nerve to do it again."

"Do what?" Mr. Appleby was open mouthed interest, not seeing as yet where he came in.

"Chase you." Mr. Lee was growing impatient. "So I looked out the door while Elvira was dressing and I yelled, 'Gee whiz, there he is again!' and I beat it. I told Elvira over my shoulder I'd wait for her at the end of the hall, for I was going to keep a lookout for the crazy guy. I wouldn't have gotten these togs for you if she hadn't been out locking up the silver and the ice box."

"But where do I come in?" stammered Mr. Appleby.

"Well—er—you stand where I told Elvira I'd be and give me time to get to Green's. See? She'll be looking out every minute to see if I'm waiting, and we don't go for a quarter of an hour yet. She's gotta make this train or none, and she won't have time to hunt me then, see?"

The proposition did not appeal strongly to Mr. Appleby. He began to accumulate visions of Elvira. Still he owed George a great deal, and certainly Elvira wouldn't do or say much to a stranger.

"But—but what'll I say to her?" he asked.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Lee, picking up his hat. "You're just standing there. But you sure look like me from the rear."

Mr. Appleby glanced at his watch.

"Fifteen minutes," he pondered.

"Well, till she comes out. She won't miss the train; she never does."

The two conspirators shook hands solemnly.

"You keep the clothes till you can corral another suit," nodded Mr. Lee. "I'll drop in to-morrow and see you."

And Mr. Appleby closed his door and ascended joyously to the sixth floor. If Elvira waited there for him with a cudgel, if tall fuzzy headed old maids in red kimonos prowled the halls, Miss Brown dwelt there also, let him remember that! Miss Brown, probably now partaking of her tomato soup, cold ham and fixings!

Mr. Appleby chuckled and fondled his ten dollar bill.

No matter what sort of a termagant Elvira was, she was not his, praise be! Neither was Mrs. Harnby Ellis! What an escape! Mr. Appleby shuddered and took up the position George had suggested at the end of the corridor. He looked dreamily out the window, his back to the Lee apartment on the left, and at his right, viewed cautiously from the corner of one eye, was Miss Brown's door through which he had catapulted so short a time since.

Good heavens, how long had this charming being lived here so near him? A month? Had she said a month? And he had eaten and slept and existed in asinine ignorance!

But what was that? A trifle! Had he not lived forty-four awful empty years without knowing her? The infinitely precious time he had wasted!

"You're there, are you?" called a shrill voice he remembered distinctly. "Don't you move till I come out! If you try to play any tricks like you did last Fourth of July you'll be a sorry man!"

Mr. Appleby shuddered. Should he run? What would she do to him, this Elvira person? Hadn't he better turn around before she quite reached him? If she laid him out and he lost all consciousness would he be carried to Miss Brown's apartment?

Oh, angelic vision! She would nurse him back to life and they would all live happily ever after. All but George, poor George!

Mr. Appleby whirled dizzily and unexpectedly about as a strong hand was inserted in his arm, and Mrs. George Lee bade him sternly come along with her or they would miss the train. Mr. Appleby, who had had visions of poor father in the comic section and had expected momently to receive a jardiniere upon his head, stagger a bit dazedly and fall prostrate outside HER door, did not object to the little whirl.

"Madam," he began in injured surprise, and Mrs. Lee gave a thin little squeal and recoiled from him.

"I thought— Where's my husband? Where's George Lee?" she demanded of the placid Mr. Appleby, who was regarding her impersonally.

"Never having seen you before, madam, I can hardly be expected to know where your husband is," Mr. Appleby retorted with dignity, which, though a very well sounding retort, had not much sense to it when one looked into it.

But Mrs. Lee didn't look. She appeared dazed. "You're the image of him from the back!" she snapped.

"What are you doing here where he was going to be?"

"I was looking out the window," said Mr. Appleby, still with dignity. "I haven't seen anyone else here at all."

"Well, it's pretty queer," said Mrs. Lee and curled her lip. "I knew George Lee would play me some trick. Just wait till I come back! Just the same, I think it's strange enough your being right here and looking like George and all. Even your clothes look like his!"

She took a step nearer and Mr. Appleby in a panic put one hand on Miss Brown's door and feebly knocked.

His clothes! Great Scott! Perhaps in a moment this awful female would recognize some buttom she had sewed on, some familiar gasoline mark, some— Mr. Appleby shivered and knocked again.

"I assure you, madam, I know nothing about you or your affairs," he repeated, and just then Miss Brown opened her door and once more he stood within the radiance of that widely charming smile.

"Come right in, Mr. Appleby, dinner is all ready!" She nodded, smiled impersonally upon Mrs. Lee and closed the door firmly.

"Didn't I do that well?" she asked Mr. Appleby in the privacy of her own apartments. "What's the matter now? Was she about to murder you for wearing George's clothes?"

Mr. Appleby gasped. "Then you know—"

"Of course. I saw him sneaking down the hall with them a little while ago."

The cherubic smile once more crept out about Mr. Appleby's ears. He felt that all danger was past and that naught but rosy paths lay ahead.

"You—mentioned dinner just now," he ventured timidly.

"I did," said Miss Brown regretfully. "But there isn't any. I'm sorry. I ate it."

"Oh, well," said Mr. Appleby airily, "I didn't mean your dinner. I meant our dinner."

Then as Miss Brown stared in a kind of pleasant incomprehension, Mr. Appleby explained a bit shamefacedly.

"You see, I'm alone and you're alone. It's Thanksgiving Day. I've had a pretty nerve wracking time of it so far, and I'm hungry. While you, well, you weren't eating any of the right things, you know, so you must have room for them yet. Also, I—I haven't any overcoat, and—er—have you last night's paper?"

Miss Brown's lovely eyes opened widely and she gave a little schoolgirlish giggle.

"Why, yes, but I'm afraid it won't do much good for that," she said demurely.

"For what?"

"For an overcoat."

Mr. Appleby stared, rather hurt.

"Don't guy me now, Miss Brown," he pleaded. "I've had an awful day and I'm a hungry man. I'll tell you about it all later."

"Then you're not going to the house party?" Miss Brown handed him the evening paper he had asked for.

"No. Could have, but didn't want to." Mr. Appleby was hunting through the paper for the page that advertised Thanksgiving dinners. "Ah, here it is. Ever hear of Bascom's, Miss Brown?"

Miss Brown grew sarcastic.

"I've had an occasional dream wherein I fancied I was consuming a bit of toast or a glass of water there."

"Well, listen. I can't afford to eat at Bascom's either, but you and I are going to to-day. That is—er—listen to this:

'Thanksgiving Dinner
Oyster Cocktail
Tomato Soup
Roast Turkey Cranberry Sauce
Mashed Potatoes Turnip Squash
Waldorf Salad
Chocolate Ice Cream Pumpkin Pie
Cheese Nuts Coffee.'"

Miss Brown drew a long breath.

"Don't!"

"Know where Bascom's is, don't you?" Mr. Appleby's round eyes shone.

"Surely. One can know that without going into bankruptcy. Just around the corner."

"Well, and here it says," read on Mr. Appleby intently:

"'Bring yourself to our Thanksgiving dinner or we will bring our Thanksgiving dinner to you.' And as I said, I haven't any overcoat, so we can't go to it very well."

Miss Brown's eyes danced. "Oh, you mean—oh, I see!" she cried delightedly. "Do you suppose it will be very improper?"

"What?"

"Your—your eating here in my rooms, alone with—"

"My dear young woman!" Mr. Appleby lifted mild brows. "After the morning I've had, nothing, simply nothing, seems improper to me or ever can again. Besides, what's wrong about it?"

"Nothing at all!" said Miss Brown valiantly. "You telephone while I clear the table."

Mr. Appleby paused on his blissful way to the instrument.

Their laughing eyes met.

"I'm darn glad I bought those gray trousers," he said dreamily, his gaze upon the fascinating face across the room.

Miss Brown dimpled and picked up the empty soup dish in one hand and a box of crackers in the other.

"I can say something nicer than that," she nodded, and Mr. Appleby, receiver in hand, turned in glad expectancy.

"What is it?"

"I'm glad your burglar liked them!"

JIMMY'S SOUVENIRS

By F. M. PUMPHREY

The lieutenant suspects that he is being spoofed, but the mere suspicion does not prevent his being spoofed in a manner that pleases everybody, including Jimmy's girl in Illinois.

ERE, private," snapped the lieutenant, "what are you going to do with that potato?"

But first let us explain just what the private *was* doing with the potato; for the uses of the potato are various. It might have been intended for the slum for supper, in which case the private, along with eight or ten other privates, would have been engaged in scraping, peeling and gouging the eyes out of the potato with a mess-kit knife, with the prospect of having ten or twelve bushels peeled by three o'clock and the further prospect of having two sacks of onions to peel afterward. Or it might have been just a stray potato which had dropped out of a hole in a sack when the donkey engine hoisted them aboard the ship, and had rolled into a scupper where it caught the eye of the private and gave him ideas.

Not that the private—cognomen Albaugh, praenomen James, sobriquet Jimmy—had been thinking of potatoes. No he had been thinking of a girl—name of Amaryllis—for whom he had collected no souvenirs; and she had particularly asked for souvenirs, just like Mary Piper, whose Fred was already home. Jimmy had intended to buy the souvenirs last pay day; but "Little Joe" and "Big Dick" and all the other spots on the dice had forsaken him. He had lost every cent of his pay and ten francs besides that he had got for his raincoat from a Frenchman. He would have to tell her he mailed a package from Tours, and if it had not arrived it was not his fault. He leaned against the railing around the forward hatch and began to whistle "Madelon," when the potato caught his eye. It was a potato unsuitable for cooking, an ancient potato with a wrinkled skin and doubtful at one end, a tempting potato somewhat smaller than a baseball, but nevertheless with good carrying qualities. Jimmy strolled over to the scupper and seized the potato. Then, whistling softly, he went back to the railing and looked about idly for something to throw at. A few soldiers were on the forward deck, but none of them was intimate enough with Jimmy to be hit on the head with a potato. He wished a flying fish would jump out of the water, or a porpoise, or something like that. His eyes wandered down into the hold, where a detail was getting out the provisions for the next day's mess. In charge of the detail was a sergeant named Miller, otherwise known as "Goofey." Jimmy's brain clicked, and his hand gripped the potato. Goofey was the duty sergeant of the casual company Jimmy belonged to. His job was to pick details of privates and make them work. Life in that casual company was one continual dodging of Goofey. If he walked into a barrack by the front door, the men stampeded to get out of the back door. He was well liked when he was not in sight.

Jimmy took careful aim. He figured he could drop the potato neatly on Goofey's head and step back out of sight, and no one would be the wiser. He was just about to let the potato fall when—

"Here, private," snapped the lieutenant, "what are you going to do with that potato?" It was Lieutenant Maston, who had charge of the hold detail on the boat.

Jimmy thought quickly. Passing the potato from his right hand to his left he came to attention. He looked at the potato, then saluted respectfully.

"I'm going to save it, sir," he replied.

"Save it?" snapped the lieutenant.

"Yes, sir. Food is scarce, sir. Thousands of young children starving, sir. Belgians and Serbians, sir. Millions of 'em, sir. Food should not be wasted, sir."

The lieutenant had a dim suspicion that he was being spoofed. He was a stern lieutenant with a long jaw, eye glasses, and a mouth like a slit. He took for granted all the things that the newspapers and magazines say about officers. There was ninety days of training school snap in his voice, and he thought he was a superman. He felt sure the private had been about to throw the potato at someone in the hold; but the private claimed he was saving the potato. There was no way to disprove this contention, which the lieutenant nevertheless felt to be nonsensical. It looked as if he were being spoofed. He hurriedly looked the soldier over to see if there was anything he could censure him for. Not a thing! As a soldier the private was impeccable. His position was attention, and his face was that of a confirmed sap-head, which is the correct military expression for a private.

It was a case requiring heavy thought on the part of the officer. There was nothing in any of the army manuals, in general orders, or in any special orders, covering this sort of thing. The lieutenant would have to use his own brains. At last he came to a conclusion. If the private was spoofing him he should suffer by his own spoofing. He should be made to save that potato.

"Very well," snapped Lieutenant Maston, glaring at Jimmy as if he had caught the latter making faces at a baby, or something serious like that. "Very well, save it. Report to me to-morrow morning with the potato, and every morning hereafter until further notice."

"Yes, sir," answered the private. Saluting smartly he did a regulation about face and descended to the mess hall, where he engaged in a game of pinochle with some of his friends. The potato he wrapped in a paper from a lemon presented him by the Y. M. C. A. the day before.

The next morning he mounted to the upper deck, which was for officers and Y. M. C. A. people only. "Got to report to Lieutenant Maston," he told the guard at the ladder.

"All right," said the guard, "kiss the big slob for me."

"Do I want to die?" asked Jimmy, and went on his way.

He found the lieutenant with two other officers, a "Y" man from Italy and two "Y" women, seated on a bench. Lieutenant Maston had a musette bag, or French knapsack, full of souvenirs which he was showing to his friends. There were some one pound shells prettily carved to serve as vases, some German buckles and buttons, a large piece of beautiful blue silk, and a roll of fine old ivory-colored lace.

"They are all for a friend of mine in Kansas City," the lieutenant was saying. "She was extremely interested in the war, and I am sure she will be pleased. Her preference in colors is for blue, and that guided me in my selection. I have enough of the silk and lace to make an entire gown. Perhaps you have heard of her. Walker is the name; she is very well known in educational circles."

The "Y" women and the other officers said no, they had not heard of her, but she certainly was fortunate. One of the "Y" women remarked that the silk was "too awfully awfully sweet," and wished she had a friend who was good to her like that.

Jimmy clicked his heels together and saluted. The lieutenant returned the salute with a questioning look in his eye.

"Private Albaugh, sir, reporting with potato," said Jimmy.

"Very well," snapped Lieutenant Maston. He had forgotten the incident, but one always snaps out "very well" in cases of doubt. Jimmy reached into the pocket of his blouse, extracted the potato, unwrapped it and exhibited it. It was more doubtful than ever; the soggy end had become positively impossible. The lieutenant remembered, and still had the uncomfortable idea that he was being spoofed; but Jimmy maintained the impassibility of a cement hitching post.

"Very well," he snapped again. He hoped that the other officers and the "Y" girls were taking proper notice of his military manner.

"If the lieutenant will pardon me, I also have a lemon," said Jimmy. "Would the lieutenant care to inspect the lemon?"

More than ever Lieutenant Maston had the suspicion that spoofing was going on. His face grew red with anger.

"Very well," he snapped.

Jimmy extracted from his pocket a lemon which had been packed in the corner of the case and had suffered in consequence. He held it up before the lieutenant and turned it so that all sides might be inspected.

"Very well," snapped the officer.

Jimmy saluted, did an about face, and retreated.

"There," remarked the lieutenant, "goes one of the men who ruin our army. I found him yesterday about to throw that potato at someone in the hold—" and he went on the explain the whole case. "Evidently he wants to keep it up," he said. "I shall see that he keeps those things until he grows tired of it."

Down in the mess hall Jimmy was describing the inspection to a delighted audience.

The following day he did not report until late in the evening. Lieutenant Maston had escorted a "Y" woman to a bench in the lee of a life boat on the top deck. He was telling her of the trouble he had had in the quartermaster's office at Tours —how inefficient he had found it and how he had forced the hand of the captain in charge and had made great reforms.

"I went to him," he was saying, "and asked, 'Do you have the daily report of bacon grease used in frying eggs for the officers' mess of the 999th Street Sweeping Battalion for March 28th?' and he replied—"

A cough was heard, and there was Jimmy standing at salute in the twilight.

"Private Albaugh reporting with potato and lemon," he said.

"Very well," snapped Lieutenant Maston.

Jimmy opened a musette bag just like the one the lieutenant kept his souvenirs in, and extracted the potato, the lemon, three pieces of hard-tack, an end of a loaf of bread, and a piece of sausage left over from lunch.

"I have these other things I found, sir," reported Jimmy. "I find a great deal of food is wasted, sir."

The lieutenant glanced at the collection.

"Very well," he snapped.

Jimmy retired, but Lieutenant Maston did not go on with the tale of the quartermaster's office at Tours. Gazing at the sea he wondered if he really were being spoofed, and to what extent. His suspicions were deep; but Jimmy was ostensibly so sincere about his food saving that the lieutenant could not make up his mind about it.

If the "Y" girl was laughing it was too dark to be seen.

In the morning Jimmy was stopped by Goofey, who was running wild with a list of names in his hand.

"Albaugh," he said, "you're on guard tonight."

"I am like heck," objected Jimmy. "I'm excused from all detail. I have to report to Lieutenant Maston every day."

"For what?" demanded Goofey. "With that mess o' junk you carry around with you?"

"Go and ask him," answered Jimmy. "I'm not publishing his business."

Goofey doubtfully scratched his head and took Jimmy's name from the list.

"It's an ill wind," said Jimmy, "which don't get me out of detail."

The rest of the voyage he did no work and was never seen without the musette bag containing his collection. With the aid of his friends he added to it every day.

Lieutenant Maston began to find the situation embarrassing. Jimmy hunted him up any time and place he chose. Everyone on the ship knew about it, and officers had the habit of asking the lieutenant each time they saw him whether anything new had been added to the collection yet. They offered him suggestions as to how to dispose of it. When Jimmy reported they clustered around to view the display, and an aide even told the colonel in charge

of the ship about it. The lieutenant felt almost sure he was being spoofed and spoofed badly.

The day before the ship sailed into New York Jimmy entered the officers' dining hall at noon mess. Looking about him for a moment he went to Lieutenant Maston, who ate at the same table as the colonel.

"Private Albaugh reporting with the potato, lemon, hard-tack, bread, sausage, tomato, half can of corned beef, piece of boiled ham, and a blind robin," he said as he saluted.

The lieutenant's face grew red. All the officers and "Y" people stopped talking and turned their eyes toward Jimmy.

"Report to me after mess," choked the officer.

"No. Let's see what he's got," said said the colonel. He was a fat man with a mustache and a sense of humor.

Jimmy unstrapped the musette bag and exhibited the articles one by one. The potato was beyond all hope, the lemon had gone green, and the tomato would scarcely stand handling.

"Did you mention a blind robin?" asked the colonel. "What is a blind robin?"

Jimmy reached into his hip pocket and brought forth the prize of his collection —a smoked herring he had got from a sailor. Unwrapping it from the bit of paper which protected it he held it proudly by the tail. It was an aged herring with a wicked eye; a herring with a disreputable leer and a rapscallion twist to his tail that made one suspect that he had been caught while out for a night of it and had been smoked while in that condition. He was a herring you wouldn't care to have your daughter go out with if your daughter were a nice young lady herring just out of high school. At sight of him two second lieutenants who could never learn to like a sea voyage got up and left the hall in a hurry.

The colonel laid down his knife and fork. His twisting eyes narrowed. He began to chuckle and grin. His face got red and shiny and letting his arms hang down he leaned back in his chair and roared.

"Oh, ho, ho, ho," he laughed. "Ho, ho, ho, haw. Oh, Lord! Is that—haw, haw, haw—is that a blind, ho, robin?" A tear trickled down his face. As soon as he began all the officers and "Y" men and women also laughed. All except Lieutenant Maston. Now he was quite sure he was being spoofed. His face grew red and sterner than ever. He was so serious he might have posed for a picture of General Whoozis directing the Ohlala drive.

Jimmy replaced his food.

"Would the lieutenant care to have me report to-morrow?" he asked.

"Yes," snapped the lieutenant. "You may go now. And see that you keep that stuff with you."

Jimmy did his right about face and went out. Lieutenant Maston glared at the company in general, who laughed more than ever.

In the morning there was the hustle and bustle of getting off the boat. Jimmy with the other enlisted men was out of bed at four thirty, ordered to get his pack on, and was then made to stand in line on deck for about two hours while the officers made arrangements for the debarkation. The colonel with some officers and orderlies had gone ashore to make the arrangements.

Suddenly one of the orderlies dashed up the gang plank cursing loudly and bitterly.

"What seems to be the matter, Hennery?" inquired Jimmy, as the orderly passed him in the line. He had his pack on, and his musette bag hung from his shoulder.

"Matter enough, that's all. I got to get my pack and stuff on and get down there where Lieutenant Maston is, in ten minutes. And I ain't had a chance to roll my blankets yet. And I got to chase up to his stateroom for a musette bag and a suitcase. He's goin' to Washington with the colonel, the big stiff!"

"Ain't he coming back here any more?"

"Naw."

"I'll go get the musette bag and suitcase and have them here for you when you come up," offered Jimmy. "Where are they?"

"Much obliged, Jimmy. Right up above here, next deck, number twenty-seven. I'll be up in ten minutes."

The orderly hurried down into the steerage, where his bunk was located. Jimmy watched his chance when the top sergeant was not looking, and leaving the line ran up a ladder to the deck above. When the orderly came back Jimmy had the suitcase and musette bag all ready for him.

In another half hour the men were moved off the boat, after which they were fed by the Red Cross, ferried to Hoboken, railroaded to Camp Merritt, where they were deloused and classified and within a week were on their way to their home camps to be discharged.

Lieutenant Maston, after a few days' hurried activity in Washington, received a special discharge and proceeded at once to Kansas City. Soon after arriving at his boarding house he called a taxi and, all dressed up in his best serge uniform, two service stripes and a victory bar, he went to call upon his fiancee, for whom he had brought the souvenirs. She was a school teacher engaged in Administrative Work, wore glasses, had High Ideals, and hoped to carry on her Work after marriage.

After a chaste kiss and the customary felicitations upon a safe return from the Horrible War, the lieutenant said:

"I have managed to pick up a few souvenirs for you. Some are from the battle fields. I procured them from French soldiers. Others are things I picked up myself. There is some lace, and a rather good piece of silk I got in Lyons. I will show you."

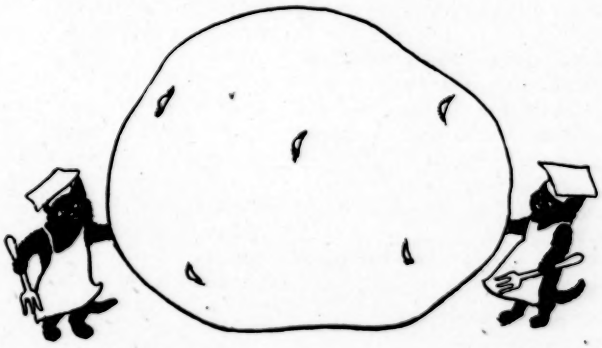
He unstrapped the musette bag and opened it. An odor came forth. Doubtfully the lieutenant pulled a piece of greasy newspaper from the top—and there was Jimmy's collection of conserved food. The herring lay on top staring with his rakish eye right into the face of the lady, who was eagerly bending over the bag to see.

"Damn!" said the officer in consternation, and he looked up at his lady. But she was delicately pinching her nostrils and looking out the window. There was a suspicious twinkle about her eyes that left the officer with no doubt that he was spoofed. He forgot his manners and again ejaculated "Damn!"

In a small town in central Illinois a young girl—name of Amaryllis—held a piece of blue silk against her breast and looked into a mirror to see the effect.

"Jim, you dear," she said, "how did you ever happen to get so exactly my own color?"

"Oh, I got an eye for those things," said Jimmy easily. "I never did forget how you looked in blue."



THE BOOZE ARTIST

By WALTER VOGDES

A young fellow's deliberate attempt to lower himself in the eyes of his prospective father-in-law has a more far reaching effect than he anticipates, and a final result that is more than he deserves.

I HAD felt it for sometime, and it came, stronger than ever, as I rang the door bell at the Stephens house. It was dissatisfaction. Plainly put, I was tiring of Elsa Stephens.

I had a feeling that something, some great force, you might say, was trying to fence me in; and I did not want to be fenced in just yet. I wanted to see the world and live and all that.

Yes, I was tiring of Elsa. But not so long before, I had faced the Stephens door in the evenings with quite a different feeling.

Grace Stephens, Elsa's sister, let me in. "Evening 'Gene," she said. There was something ominous in the look that accompanied her innocent and simple greeting. I have never liked Grace. She's catty.

She led the way down the hall toward the sitting room, but I stopped at the parlor door. Elsa and I generally sat in the parlor.

Grace turned. "Come on back here," she said. "Elsa's upstairs, dressing."

I followed reluctantly. I could see the Stephens family in the sitting room and I'm not fond of them, especially Old Man Stephens. As I entered, Mrs. Stephens nodded from the kitchen doorway, where she stood drying her hands.

"Evening 'Gene," she said. "Awful weather."

"Chilly, somewhat," I answered.

Old Man Stephens, who was reading, rattled his newspaper and arose holding out a big freckled hand. He is tall and stoop shouldered and has a bald head and a blank face, and everybody knows he's a shrewd one at business. He is one of the richest men in Birdsboro.

"How do?" he said, looking his blankest. "Chilly, you say?"

"Yes, chilly, somewhat," I answered.

The Stephens twins lolling on the couch, giggled. I hate those twins.

"You two shut up and sit up," said Grace. "Don't act so disgraceful.

"They're laughing at you," she explained to me sympathetically.

Old Man Stephens folded his big hands across his newspaper and started to talk. I replied politely and watched his Adam's apple ride up and down above his low, two-sizes-too-large collar.

Presently Elsa entered, looking very pretty in a white dress with a pink sash. She had a pink ribbon in her hair, too. She smiled at me and said, "I'm sorry to be late." Then she sat down near by.

I wondered why she did not suggest going into the parlor. She seemed embarrassed and was blushing. As soon as Elsa arrived, Old Man Stephens ducked down behind his newspaper. Grace sat in one corner scribbling on a piece of paper.

Elsa and I were almost engaged. As good as engaged, I suppose. I can't remember that I ever actually said, "Will you?" So of course Elsa had never said she would. But one evening in the parlor a sort of little impulsive move had been made, followed by other little impulsive moves, and that was how it was. After that, as Elsa said, we both knew. And she began to talk about furniture and things.

I hadn't spoken to Elsa's father about it. I rather disliked that job for I knew the old man would raise a rumpus and ask questions about my salary and habits and everything. And the Stephens twins would probably listen at the keyhole.

As Elsa and I talked, Grace folded the piece of paper. Then she arose, and came over, and handed it to me.

"Read it," she whispered, retreating toward her chair.

I stole a glance at Elsa. She was looking away and blushing. I opened the note and read:

"I think father is beginning to wonder about you and Elsa."

I gave a startled look around the room and moved as if to rise, fingering the paper nervously. Grace's shoe button eyes were fixed on me; the twins were suddenly silent. Old Man Stephens was still concealed behind his newspaper.

I stood up and cleared my throat. I felt a drop of perspiration trickle down my forehead.

"Mr. Stephens."

The newspaper rattled as Old Man Stephens's oystery gray eyes peered over the top.

"May I speak to you for a moment?"

"Certainly." He was up. "Right in here." He led the way to the parlor.

"Well, my boy?" He had taken a nervy way of my-boying me lately.

"Mr. Stephens," I said, "I'm in love with your daughter. I—we want to get married."

There was a slight pause and I waited for him to cut loose.

"I see no reason why you shouldn't," he said calmly. "You young folks are interested in each other. You are a thrifty young man; your position at the Farmers' Bank warrants you in taking this step, I presume."

"I'm in line to be assistant cashier." I spoke with difficulty.

"Just so. And you have no bad habits? You aren't dissipated? You don't smoke cigarettes, drink, gamble, or keep fast company?"

"No sir."

"Just so. My daughter must not marry a man who does any of those things. Understand I'm not down on all smoking. Cigar or pipe, all right. But no cigarettes."

"Yes, sir."

"Well then, I see no reason."

We returned to the sitting room and I had an awful feeling that it was settled. It's the same sort of feeling that comes over you when you're getting the grip. Old Man Stephens went back to his newspaper, and Grace suggested a game of Honest John. Elsa was still flushed.

The evening passed slowly. Elsa and I were both nervous. Finally I left the house and, as I walked toward home along the quiet, dark streets, I was throbbing with an angry feeling that grew larger each moment. The feeling of dissatisfaction that I had felt earlier in the evening had been growing for days. And the events of the evening had brought it to a head. My fighting blood, as you might say, was up.

I hated Grace, but most of all I hated Elsa. Sitting there pretending to be embarrassed! She had even reproached me just before I left for not wearing my rubbers. She seemed to think she owned me.

I reached my boarding house. George Redfield and I boarded at old Mrs. Hendrickson's and roomed together. George, who was studying law with Burchell and Morris, did all the things that Elsa's father objected to. He drank, gambled, and smoked cigarettes. But of course people don't expect so much of a young man who is studying law as they do of one who is in line to be assistant cashier.

To-night, for a wonder, George was at home, reading. As I entered and threw my hat spitefully on the bed he looked up.

"Peeved?" he inquired mildly.

"Sore," I muttered, sitting on a trunk and thrusting my chin in my hands.

"Vas iss?"

"Oh, nothing much."

"Vas iss?"

"It's that girl." George and I had discussed Elsa before. I had felt that I must talk over my situation with some one, and George was my closest friend. I related the events of the evening.

"It was a put-up job!" I finished hotly.

"They've got you bound and gagged," said George sympathetically.

"Bound," I admitted, "but not gagged. The more I think of it, the less I think I'll stand for it. I wasn't absolutely engaged to Elsa, and they've forced me into

this. I don't want to get married—that is, not just yet. I want to wait a few years."

"Wise boy," said George. "Just my plan. See a little life first. Look 'em over in other towns. Break it off. Travel. See Des Moines, Chicago, Atlantic City, Paris. Pipe the world's best Janes, then pick one out. No hurry about it. Break it off."

"But how can I break it off."

"Dunno." George shrugged his shoulders. "From what you say, this Elsa person and her family will die hard. You might go away."

"No," I said decidedly. "I'll stay right here."

"I see. The good old fight-it-out-on-this-line spirit. Suit yourself. But you've got to have a plan. That's necessary. Absolutely."

I didn't answer. I was staring at the leaves on the wall paper, but hardly seeing them. My face grew warmer as I stared.

"Feel it coming on?" inquired George.

I jumped up and strode back and forth. "I wonder?" I said, and stopped.

"Dunno," answered George, "but it seems like a pretty good plan as far as you got."

"I believe it would go," I said. "When I was talking to Old Man Stephens tonight he gave me to understand that if I dissipated I'd not have a look-in with Elsa. He's down on cigarettes, booze, gambling, and all that."

"Yes."

"Well, I was just thinking that if I took to smoking cigarettes and going over to Royston's Pool Parlors, and if I drink a little, just temporarily you know, why—"

George sprang up and held out his hand. "Put it there, 'Gene Tribbel, put it there!" he cried. "I see your drift, you're showing real talent."

He stood looking down at me, a glow of approval on his face. George is tall and I'm not. He is thin, too, while I tend slightly the other way.

"I rather hate to do it, though," I said. "I hate pool and cigarettes and whisky. I just naturally don't seem to like them. But I'll make the try. How shall I start?"

We planned it before going to bed. I was to smoke cigarettes in public and frequent Royston's.

"The next time you go up to Stephens's," said George, "you take a drink beforehand. And mention to Elsa that you've had heavy losses at that low-life game of poker. On Saturday night you get lit up and allow yourself to be seen. This, being a small town and a prohibition one, you'll get lots of publicity. Even if Stephens doesn't see you he'll be sure to hear about it. Then he'll order you to cease your attentions to his daughter and never to darken his door again. He'll be sure to put the darken part in. It's bound to work. Absolutely."

"I'll do it."

When I look back on that decision I realize that the man who first made the remark about letting well enough alone was right. But I couldn't see his wisdom then.

The next day I bought some cigarettes. In the evening George and I went down to Royston's, and he tried to show me how pool is played. I confess that I don't see so all-fired much in it. George said he could understand that.

"You just naturally muff all the best points," he said. "No wonder you find it dull. You handle your cue like a grubbin' hoe."

Occasionally I would step out to the street and look up and down, cue in one hand, cigarette in the other. But no member of the Stephens family passed.

The next evening I was to see Elsa. I was in my room adjusting my tie when George entered.

"Here it is," he said, taking a flask from his pocket. "Lucky for you that you threw in with a guy like me that knows where to get this. Take a long one."

I tipped up the flask. I spluttered and blinked as I felt the hot stuff going down my throat. Some of it I missed and it ran down my chin.

"Don't waste it!" shouted George.

"Awful stuff!" I gasped. "Don't see how anyone can get to like it."

"Regular firewater," said George. "Be a booze artist for a night. It's easy enough to like it when you get started. The thing is to be one of those guys that

can take it or let it alone. That's me. Have another."

Again I tipped the flask.

As I left the house I felt a warm glow steal over me. It wasn't so bad after all.

Elsa came to the door herself and she looked especially pretty, I thought. She put her hands on my shoulders and stepped close to be kissed. Then she stopped and drew back.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Nothing." She looked frightened. "You've—you've been drinking."

"Yes," I agreed. "Just had a couple. Brightens a man up."

She led the way to the parlor, the frightened look still on her face, her brown eyes unusually large.

"You don't mind, do you?" I said. "'S all right. The thing is to be one of those guys that can take it or let it alone. That's me."

Her frightened look was going away. She was angry.

"Let's go to the movies," I suggested. "Good bill to-night."

Her refusal was briefly put.

It seemed to me that the evening passed with extraordinary swiftness. I realized that I was doing most of the talking, but I enjoyed myself immensely. Elsa had never seemed more entertaining. As I rose to go, I took out a cigarette.

"Light this in here if you don't mind," I said. "Too windy outside."

Old Man Stephens came in as we started for the door. "Have a cigarette," I said, fumbling in my pocket for the box.

"No thanks!" He glared at me and, sniffing suspiciously, passed along the hallway to the sitting room. I heard him slam the door.

Elsa suddenly threw her arms around my neck. "Oh, 'Gene, don't!"

The suddenness of her move and her words startled me. I realized with a rush that I was a brute and that I was hurting her. I had a sort of all-gone feeling.

"It's all right," I whispered.

"No it isn't. Something's come over you. You're different. Tell me all about it. What has happened? Tell me; I'll help you."

I hadn't bargained for anything like that. I patted her soft hair. "It's all right, I tell you."

She sighed and drew away. "I just know it's that old George Redfield. He's making you bad."

This would never do. If I stayed any longer I should blurt out everything. "Must go," I said. "Good night."

Once more I was walking along the darkened street. This time I was hating myself.

"How did it go?" asked George, as soon as I entered the room.

"It went all right, I s'pose," I answered. "I made Elsa feel bad and I feel like a murderer. It seems a rotten trick."

"H'm," murmured George. "Sorry you started it, eh."

"Sort of."

"Well, I suppose that's to be expected. Conscience taking bites at you. But don't give up. You've taken the first line of trenches. One more move and you're free. It's Daniel Cupid versus old Demon Rum, and I've got two bits on the Demon."

I didn't answer.

"You still want to break it off, don't you?" continued George.

"Yes," I said. "I just don't like the way of doing it."

"Well, stick to it and no sympathy. Sympathy will ruin any man. Be ruthless. All the world's great men have been that way. Look at Napoleon. He wasn't sympathetic. You've made a good start and to-morrow is Saturday. Then you get soused."

I looked at him.

"You get soused right out on Main Street and Papa Stephens hears about it. Better still, maybe he'll meet you in that awful condition. Then he'll pull that stuff about not darkening his door."

Main Street was crowded with people as George and I set out on Saturday night. Birdsboro is a Saturday night town. Fatty Johnson, who has the peanut and pop corn cart, was selling as fast as he could make change, and there was a line at the ticket office of the Crystal movie theatre. Every hitching post was in use and there were lots of farm people climbing in and out of

wagons and Fords and going in and out of stores. George and I were talking loudly, and the feeling of warmth and exhilaration again came over me.

We stopped in at Royston's for a few moments and watched the drummers playing pool and rummy. Then we took to the street again. I noticed that people were staring at us.

"What's matter with us?" I demanded. "Everybody stares so."

"Insult, I call it," said George.

We met a great many people we knew, and our greetings were loud and cordial. But the persons we greeted generally answered briefly and put on extra speed.

"No sign of Stephens," said George.

"No," I answered. "Funny, too. He's generally out Saturday night. Can't understand it."

It was getting late. We had "had another" a number of times and George, pulling his flask from his pocket, was announcing that there were only a few more left.

Then I saw Old Man Stephens. He looked bigger than usual and he was alone. And he was coming straight toward me. His face had its ordinary blank look, but his pale eyes were fixed steel. There were only a few people near us.

"Evening, Mr. Stephens," I said, stepping forward.

"So you're this sort!" he said. "A town rowdy!"

I felt myself swaying and shriveling. "Beg pardon?" I tried to draw myself up stiffly, but I couldn't.

"And you had the effrontery to ask me—" Stephens stopped and thrust his face close to mine. "Don't you ever darken my door again! Remember that when you sober up!"

....He was gone. George was pulling at my sleeve. "Didn't I tell you? Pulled that darken stuff didn't he? Knew he would. Come on."

We reached home somehow, and I climbed into bed and fell asleep.

I awoke in the morning feeling that something was hurting me. At first I could not place it, but, as I grew more wakeful, I realized that it was my head. The yellow sunlight streaming through the window made me blink. Church bells were ringing for early meeting. George was at the washstand dousing himself with cold water. He looked toward me.

"How do you feel?" he shouted.

I moaned.

"Bad as that? Hard luck. You haven't got the constitution. You'll never make a booze artist."

"It's my head!" I gasped.

"Sure. Always is. But look at me. Fit as a fid. Never felt better." George began rubbing his face vigorously with a coarse towel.

"You get up and run around the block a few times. It'll make a new man of you."

I buried my face in the pillow.

Presently, George, hair brushed and fully dressed, stepped over to the bed. "I'm going down stairs to breakfast. Shall I tell Mrs. Hendrickson you'll be down?"

I squirmed.

"All right," said George. The door closed.

Twenty minutes later he was back. "I told Mrs. Hendrickson you were feeling under. She's worried about you. You shouldn't have eaten that crab salad last night."

"Crab salad?"

"Sure, that's how you got sick." George grinned.

"Oh!"

"She says if you try a cup of black coffee you'll feel better. And she's right. A cold wash, a cup of black coffee, a brisk walk, and you won't know you've got a head. Come on, get out."

I pushed back the covers and scrambled out. An hour later I was striding along the street and, in accordance with the predictions of Mrs. Hendrickson and George, did feel better.

When I returned, Mrs. Hendrickson was standing on the front porch, a note in her hand. "This just came for you," she said. "That boy brought it."

I looked down the street and recognized the retreating back of one of the Stephens twins.

George was not in the room when I

went upstairs. I opened the note and read: "Dear 'Gene:

I know what father told you last night, but I must see you. I want to help you. Please meet me on Alman Street near the Methodist Church at four this afternoon.

With love, Elsa."

I folded the note and creased it until it was a small square. Then I put it in my pocket and sat down to stare out the window.

ELSA first gave me a quick look, and I knew she was wanting to tell me that I looked pale and wanting to slip her hand in mine. So I stiffened and looked sternly ahead, and she fell in at my side without a word.

We walked slowly toward the outskirts of the town. There was a sense of intimacy in the quiet afternoon. The arching trees talked in whispers. I stole a glance at Elsa and saw a pained look around her eyes. I opened the conversation.

"I suppose your father doesn't think very much of me."

She looked away for a moment. Then she said, "Father doesn't understand."

"And you?"

"Oh, 'Gene!" she said, and she gave me a look that I shall always remember.

That was all we said about it. Perhaps she had meant to say more, as she intimated in her note. But something happened. Donaldson's white bull terrier, Syke, chased a cat across our path and our thoughts. The cat ran up a tree and the terrier barked at the foot. At Elsa's suggestion I coaxed Syke off until the cat got down and away. Then Elsa sighed and smiled, and things brightened up generally. And we came to fields where there were brown cows and yellow dandelions.

When we were coming back Elsa said suddenly, "I'm sorry about that night."

"What night?" I asked, although I knew.

"When Grace gave you the note. I—I knew she was going to do it, too, and I shouldn't have let her. I didn't realize—I—"

"It's all right," I said.

"It was terrible!" Elsa's sudden vehemence and blazing eyes astonished me. "Terrible!" she repeated.

I left her near the place where we had met. She held out her hand and said good-bye quietly. I took it and answered in the same way. Not until I was almost home did I realize that her good-bye had held an odd little air of finality. Perhaps she had been unaware of it, too.

The next day I was a few minutes late in reaching the bank. I hadn't slept well the night before. Prendergast, the cashier, was away for the day, and all morning I realized that Skelley, the assistant, and Dunlap, the teller, and all the others were gossiping in whispers. Whenever I came near, they stopped. It made me sore.

In the afternoon old Mr. Lamson, the president, came in. I mentioned that the afternoon was nice, but he didn't answer.

As I was walking home after work the first blow fell. I met Myrtle Skelley, the daughter of our assistant. She is Elsa's closest friend. She stopped, looked around hurriedly, and said:

"I've something to tell you."

"Yes?" I answered.

"Elsa has been sent away. Her father found that she was out with you yesterday and he was furious. *Simply furious.* She left this morning. She asked me to see you and tell you that she hadn't wanted to go. She thought you might misunderstand."

"Where has she gone?" I asked.

Myrtle studied the toe of one shoe. "I'm not to tell. I promised."

"Oh, all right. Am I so bad as that?"

"Mr. Stephens is simply furious," apologized Myrtle.

"Let him be," I said, and started to walk off. "Thank you for telling me what you did," I called back.

George was out that evening and I was glad. I went to bed early and lay thinking of Elsa. I went over our Sunday walk and recalled the little things she had looked and said. She was gone now; I had lost her for good.

I had no sooner entered the bank the next morning than Prendergast, the cashier, saw me. He is one of these men who believe in economy in words. His motto is "Be Brief." He has these "Get Busy" and "Do it Now" cards tacked up on his desk. But he's a good cashier.

"Tribbel," he said, heading for the back office, "this way."

The way he said it! Talk about thought transference! I knew.

Prendergast is pale and delicate looking, and he wears thick glasses that make his eyes look big.

"Tribbel," he said, "your conduct recently has been of a nature that this bank cannot tolerate in any of its employees. Your services are no longer required. You will receive the usual two weeks' notice."

As he started to leave the room I answered, "It isn't necessary—the two weeks' notice. I'd rather leave now."

He bowed slightly and walked out. Out front he did some figuring and conferred with Skelley. Then Skelley came toward me with some bills and silver.

"Your pay up to and including to-day," he said.

I stuffed it in my pocket.

"Hard luck, kid," Skelley whispered, as I turned away. I've always liked Skelley; he's a good guy.

Fired! The force of it reached me as I walked along the street, my head up and my heart down. I had never been fired before, and let me tell you it takes all the gimp right out of a man. I wanted to get away from everyone and everything and everywhere. I wanted to be a hermit on an island, with a thatched hut and palm trees.

I was home and mounting the front steps. As I opened the door Mrs. Hendrickson came toward me. One look at her set face was enough. She had heard it, too.

Mrs. Hendrickson was bothered with rheumatism and didn't travel about much. So news was generally a bit late in reaching her.

As I stepped inside she said, "Mr. Tribbel, I'm afraid I'll have to have the room. Your conduct—"

"All right," I interrupted, starting upstairs.

"Your conduct," she continued firmly, "and the conduct of Mr. Redfield has been of such a nature that—"

"All right, m'am," I said. "We'll get another place."

"I won't have rowdies in my house!" she called, as I entered my room.

I looked at myself in the mirror. "You poor smear," I said. "Which shall it be, gas or chloro?"

There was a knock at the door. As I opened it Mrs. Hendrickson was pulling something from the pocket of her apron.

"Here's this; just came." She handed me a crumpled letter.

"Crab salad!" she exclaimed scornfully as I closed the door.

I stared stupidly at the letter. It was postmarked from Dunstan, a town in the western part of the state. It was Elsa's writing. I tore it open and read:

"Dearest 'Gene:

Father sent me here to stay with my uncle and my aunt. But I realize more and more that I should help you. My uncle is a Sunday School superintendent and is president of the Tradesmen's Bank here. He's like me, he thinks you need me most just now. He thinks if you can get away from your awful environment and terrible associates you'll be all right. He says he will give you a good position in his bank if you will come over. Will you?

With love, Elsa."

I glanced at my watch, looked around the room, and made some rapid calculations.

In an hour my trunk was packed and on the way to the station. Grip in hand, I gave a last look to see if I had forgotten anything. On the washstand lay a pint flask of whisky.

"Here goes you!" I exclaimed. I raised the window and sent it spinning. It made a brown splotch as it smashed on the pavement.

I ran downstairs, paid Mrs. Hendrickson, and started up the street. I arrived at the station just before the westbound train.

"Ticket for Dunstan," I said. "One way."

THE SHARK

Axel Gustafsen refers to his employer in figurative language. The simile is apt but uncomplimentary, and "Skin" Flint plans his revenge in a way calculated to please other sharks than himself.

'LL get you yet!" whined Tom Flint known along Honolulu waterfront as "Skin" Flint, and he wrung his injured fingers. Axel Gustafsen, deep-sea diver and now indignant employee of Flint's, smiled faintly and called down from the wharf's edge to a man to bring up the air hose. Then he turned to Flint with an ugly gleam in his blue eyes.

"I told you when I took this job that I needed the best and costliest gear when I'm working at such depths. You buy the cheapest you can get. It does not stand thirty feet pressure. Luckily it didn't drown me. Now either give me the coin for a new, good air hose or—"

"Looky here," said Flint, stilling his wrath, "that's a good hose and—"

Axel's heavy hand wasn't quick enough. But he snatched the long coil of white rubber hose from his helper and flung the thing in Flint's face, knocking him down. Then, without another word, he strode away. He came back a moment later to say quietly and grimly, "Sharks like you don't hand *me* anything. Now you can get some one else to risk his life in your rotten suits."

When Skin Flint figured up the day's work that night he discovered that a saving of $16.72 on the air hose he supplied Axel Gustafsen with would cost him the exact sum of $2000, the forfeit he had put up for the fulfillment of his contract with the Island Steamship Company for the recovery of certain goods on the sunken steamer Maori. The wreck lay in ninety feet of water and there was no other diver nearer than San Francisco who would undertake such a job at double the price Axel Gustafsen had contracted for.

Within the weedy body of Skin Flint was a weedy soul, filled with small and noxious growths. And the soil was ripe for another. In his last words the diver had unconsciously sown the seed.

Three weeks did Flint brood over the wrong Gustafsen had done him. True, the hose had parted; but all hose is liable to accidents. It had cost money, too. And in his miserable heart he suspected that the diver had exaggerated the depth at which the Maori lay. That would be merely business. Then why didn't Axel do business in a business fashion? Flint still gnawed his fingers and slowly there grew into his mind a thought.

He went up on the train to Pearl Harbor and hired a sampan to take him outside. There, rocking on the easy swells, Skin Flint did some strange fishing while the Japanese crew drowsed under the dirty awning. They were somewhat surprised to see that their employer had buoyed his heavy fish line and that the wooden mark was floating as if there were a heavy weight on the other end.

The next day Skin Flint hired the same sampan and returned to where the buoy still rose and fell. Once more he fished, this time with a five-pound piece of raw pork. He caught a twelve-foot shark and ordered the men to row back into the harbor, where he gave them the big fish for nothing. He returned to Honolulu with a smile on his pale lips.

"Working on a contract up this way?" asked the train conductor carelessly.

"Yes," said Flint, his smile changing into a grin.

The next day he sought Axel Gustaf-

sen and opened the conversation by saying promptly: "Gustafsen, I have a job for you, you to furnish your own suit and gear, which I'll pay for."

The diver considered him thoughtfully a moment. Flint tried to look amiable and good natured.

"What's the job?"

"I was doing some survey work outside Pearl Harbor," the contractor replied. "Lost a thousand-dollar case of instruments with all my notes and figures. I've seen a buoy about where I think it went down. About forty feet of water there."

"I suppose you want the case brought up before the water spoils everything? To-morrow?"

Flint's eyes shone. "Good! And I hope you won't bear hard feelings."

"That depends on whether you pay me five hundred for the job or not," was the indifferent reply.

"That'll include your gear?"

Gustafsen rose and stretched his big arms. "I have my own, now," he said carelessly. "My own boat and my own men. Start at six o'clock in the morning?"

"Sure. I'll take the train and go out in a small boat and point the place out," Flint responded. "I'll be much obliged."

"All right. I'll bring the case of things down here and you hand me a check for five hundred and I'll hand over your property."

For the third time the sampan, carrying Flint, crept out through the shining reaches of Pearl Harbor and toward the spot where the little buoy bobbed on the waves. The contractor could see the diving boat slowly coming in under the impulse of her sweeps. There was no wind. Skin Flint nodded to the Japanese to let the boat lie, and he peered over the side into the lucid depths. Far below he could barely see the white glimmer of the bottom. He strained his eyes, and his lips were compressed to bloodlessness as he searched the water. Last of all he quietly allowed to drop over the boat's gunwale a heavy sack filled with raw meat. He followed its course downward. His eyes gleamed; for shadows gathered about it and there was a glint of another gray whiteness than that of the coral bottom, and the shadows thickened and moved and little swirls of water turned on the oily surface. Then the shadows vanished. The sack was gone. A torn speck of canvas flitted upward and finally floated at the top. Flint picked it up and the smile on his lips widened. Then he lay back and waited for the diving boat to come up.

When it was within hailing distance Flint rose and shouted, pointing to the wooden buoy that rose and fell with an almost imperceptible motion a hundred feet away.

"That's your buoy, is it?" asked Axel Gustafsen.

"Yes, it was about there," was the reply.

The diver glanced indifferently over at it and nodded to one of his Japanese helpers, who promptly picked up a hand lead and proceeded to sound the depth of the water while Gustafsen kicked off his shoes and prepared to get into his suit.

"What kind of looking affair is it?" he demanded when he was ready for the big helmet.

Flint leaned eagerly over the side of his sampan. "It was about five feet long and a foot square," he said in a shaking voice. "It is brass cornered."

Axel turned to the man with the sounding lead.

"Seven fathom, sah."

"Well, I'll just work around and find it," the diver returned.

A moment later he had let himself down off the ladder and was gone in a swirl of foam, while two men worked the air pump and the other two held air hose and life line. As he descended, the contractor caught the flash of his big knife tied to one wrist, and his lids narrowed over his eyes. Then he worked with incredible swiftness over a thin linen sack that lay at his feet. Into it he dropped a heavy iron weight and then set in it an open gallon can filled with a red fluid—fresh beef's blood. As he worked he glanced at his men to see if they observed him.

They gave no sign. When he had finished he held the open mouth of the sack in one clenched hand and directed his men to pull towards the buoy.

A couple of sweeps of the paddles thrust his small craft almost to it. His crew stopped its progress fifty feet from the diving boat. Flint slowly leaned over the gunwale and peered down.

There was a white glimmer of the bottom and a circular shadow moving towards him. The diver was at work. The glint of his ready knife flickered now and then. And as Flint stared down he seemed to see other shadows at some distance. At last the diver's shadow was directly under his eyes. He drew a quick breath and with a soft, stealthy heave of his lean arm he lifted the linen sack over and let it slip into the water. It descended swiftly and a little crimson-black thread marked its passage.

He saw the sack strike the shadow that was Axel Gustafsen, and instantly there was a flicker of the knife. Flint leaned farther out. Other shadows were gathering. Then a dark cloud enveloped the shadow that was the diver and as if from a great distance Skin Flint heard a shout from the other boat and a rapid order. But he had no eyes for anything but the shadows below him. He saw the whole mass slowly rise, but the black cloud enveloped it and he laughed.

"Blood!" he muttered. "He cannot see to strike with his knife."

The men on the diving boat yelled, and he heard the creak of the life line in the hoisting sheave. But the shadow was now a cloud of storm. Foam was rising from it and streams of darkness that made the contractor wring his fingers and say over and over again, "Blood! Blood!"

Then a great gray body leaped in the water, followed by other gray bodies, and now the madman's lips muttered, "Shark! Shark! You called *me* a shark! The shark got *you*!"

And he leaned still farther over, wiping his hands on his silk handkerchief while the men in both boats beat on the surface of the foaming water with their oars and yelled.

Then a long, gray pillar rose from the cloud and Flint saw the great mouth of a shark as it flung itself up. Its prow-like nose was aimed directly for him. "Shark!" he muttered dazedly. And in his enormous passion he dipped exultant hands into the water.

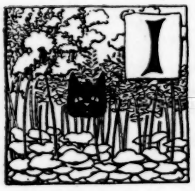
The leaping body seized his arms and with one sweep of its powerful tail dragged him out of the boat, downwards.

And the men on the two boats that floated on the stained water stared into the crimson-black depths stolidly, while the little wooden buoy leaped on the swirls. Presently a silk handkerchief appeared. It swung gently up and down as a light breeze rippled the surface. As if at a signal, the two crews set themselves to their sweeps and rowed slowly away.

THE BILLET DOUX

By ANNA BROWNELL DUNAWAY

Auntie Miller knows what to do when her husband's partner's wife finds a love letter in her husband's pocket. Query: Would Auntie Miller know what to do if Henry had an affair, and would she take her own advice?



I BELIEVE that I am acquainted with every known variety of siren, including the soulful, the practical, the artless, the sophisticated, and what not. Indeed, while woman is the sphinx of the ages, she is no mystery at all to her sex. I can see through any woman's machinations, believe me. So, when Meredith Parrish showed me a hectic love letter written in a feminine hand, which she had discovered in her husband's coat pocket—no matter why she happened to be looking in the pocket—I felt that I had, figuratively speaking, laid my finger on what O. Henry is pleased to term the hypotenuse of a triangle.

"So you have found what my washlady, Mrs. Tuppeny, would call a billy do," said I, unfolding the scented missive. "Do you know who wrote it?"

"I have my suspicions," flashed Meredith. "As if that letter were not proof enough, what do you suppose I found hanging to a button on his coat sleeve?"

"Not a hair—"

"Yes, a hair," stormed Meredith. "A long, coarse, black hair!"

"Could it have been a horse hair?" I suggested mildly.

"Certainly not," she snapped. "Is this an antediluvian age? Auntie Miller, I know one woman who has black hair, and that is Imo Berry."

"Imo Berry!" I ejaculated. "His stenographer! Nonsense!"

"And why not," said Meredith. "Are they immune?"

"But Imo!" I protested. For, to tell the truth, Imo Berry was the last person on earth I would take for a siren. She was tall and rather inclined to be angular. She had been stenographer for Henry and his partner, Bruce Parrish, for about a year. I remember when she came, I felt relieved on Henry's account, at her quite evident plainness. But there are people who grow upon one. I had come later to think that Imo Berry just missed being remarkably pretty. She had fine, dark eyes, but her face was thin and sallow. She wore glasses which were rather becoming than otherwise, and her taste in dress was exquisite.

Still, she couldn't hold a candle to Meredith with her big brown eyes and fluffy, fair hair. I glanced admiringly at its rich profusion and mentally catalogued the hirsute adornments of our feminine acquaintances. There was brown and Titian and auburn and sandy and blondine, but not a black head that I could recall save Imo Berry's.

"Have you proof that it's Imo?" I inquired.

"Who else could it be?" cried Meredith. "Whom else is he thrown with from morning to night! And he's got so he fairly lives there at the office. There can't be so much work to do. Why, do you know, Auntie Miller, I feel almost like a stranger to my own husband. I might have known some vampire was getting a hold on him."

I thought of Bruce Parrish, big, boyish, jolly and easy-going. And I thought of Meredith, pretty, sweet and charming, yet entirely immersed in her narrow sphere of housekeeping. She had a regular New England passion for housework. On the altar of an immaculate house, she sacrificed everything. She had no time for clubs, for society, for any of the endless diversions Bruce wanted to enjoy.

I think there is such a thing as being too clean. I'm sure Bruce would rather have had his wife take more of an interest in him than in her housework. Men are accustomed to sneer at women's clubs and pink teas and aid societies, but I am convinced that they are secretly glad to have their wives hold clubdom and society by its constructive tail. It really gives a man more prestige than the fact that the kitchen range is blackened twice a week. Bruce would rather have had his wife go out with him occasionally or meet him in a frilly gown, than to come home and find her on her knees, scrubbing the mopboards or waxing the hall stairs.

With these things in mind, I could not refrain from driving home a pointed remark.

"Meredith," I said, "you are playing a losing hand with Bruce. Why don't you go out with him sometimes instead of cooping yourself up here and meeting him with dust mops instead of blandishments?"

"I can't live in dirt," she declared. "Somebody has to do the work. I'm sure I am doing my duty as a wife to keep the house clean and respectable."

"But not all your duty," I reminded her. "Men and women have different standards of relative values. What is housework to a man? It is something too small to notice. He can't understand why to you, it looms as big as a mountain. What Bruce wants is a companion, a pal, a sharer of his joys and sorrows. He didn't marry a scullery maid. If another woman is writing him scented notes, why don't you hire some of this done and win him back from the tents of wickedness? If I were you, I would dress up, go to the office and propose a dinner down town and a theatre or a movie afterwards."

"I can't," said Meredith. "How preposterous! Why, this is my day to renovate the pillows."

"Oh, very well," I returned. "As a matter of fact, my hall stairs have not been swept since a week ago Sunday. I have work fairly crying aloud to be done. But I wouldn't answer for the consequences if Henry should come home and find me looking like a scrub woman in khaki feminalls. There is no better way to lose a husband."

She looked at me queerly. I really think that my words had little weight. No amount of talking would convince her of the narrowness of her vision. But in the letter lay a tangible proof that her husband was breaking away from marital bonds.

"Read it," she said, in a constrained voice.

As I skimmed it over, I found it hard to realize that Imo Berry, prim, conventional, could pen such a naive epistle. This was the text:

"Dearest:

I know it is wrong but I can't help loving you. No one has ever been so kind to me before. And yet I don't see what you find in poor, plain me, and your wife so pretty and such a wonderful housekeeper. Why, do you know I couldn't so much as cook an egg." (Here, in a dashing masculine hand, was scrawled on the margin, "Thank the Lord.") "I wish there wasn't such a thing in life as brooms and dust cloths and washing dishes. Dear, I'd be a miserable housekeeper. I'd just hire a good maid and we'd go off on long jaunts and be as merry as children (or fools). I don't care a rap about food calories or proteins or whether a dining room floor is waxed or not, or if the walls are smoked." (Here was another marginal note' "Neither do I, by Jinks!") "I only want to be with you in some sweet Elysium where every prospect pleases and only drudgery is vile.

Another thing, cutie, it's plain your wife does not appreciate you. All she cares about is a painfully clean house. She would be better off without you around, throwing cigar stubs about, and tracking in mud. She'll never believe you have any virtues till she reads them some day on your tombstone. So, darling—"

"Oh, the bold, horrid thing!" exclaimed Meredith. She had been reading over my shoulder. "Why, even I, myself, don't call Bruce 'darling'—"

"If you had," I said, "another woman might not now be doing so. Meredith,

this looks serious. Are you going to lose him to that woman, or will you put forth an effort to save him?"

At that she broke down and cried.

"I—wouldn't think it of Bruce," she choked. "He has always been so fine and honorable. That shameful creature has got around him."

"You have played into her hands, Meredith. Say what you will, we can't get around the fact that men are polygamous. It is harder to hold a husband than it is to get one. I'm not surprised at Bruce. He merely finds in this woman what you seem to him to lack. No man is by nature a monogamist. But, obviously, conciliatory love pats go a long way toward making him one."

"He can just have her!" stormed Meredith. "I'll get a legal separation! I'll show him this letter. I'll accuse him of his perfidy!"

"Any man is entitled to a fair trial," I reasoned. "Besides you should think twice before giving up an income of thirty-five hundred per, and an impregnable position. You had much better nip this in the bud. It is merely an infatuation. Say nothing to him about it. Make yourself the fit helpmeet you ought to be, and your battle is won."

"But how shall I go about it—to win him back? Oh, I can't lose Bruce, Auntie Miller. Tell me what to do!"

She was wistful, imploring. Her anger had melted away. It was plain that beneath her rigorous, New England reserve was a warm, adoring personality. And there was, in her, too, a trace of the she-bear that fights for its own.

"The thing to do, Meredith," I advised, "is to relax. Let your cherished household gods go to smash. Let the piano go undusted, and the silverware unpolished. Dress up for your husband. Wear fluffy gowns instead of those feminalls that put you in a class with a factory hand. Take time for your husband—"

"And I shall never speak to that horrid Imo Berry!" flared Meredith.

Oh, the logic of the eternal feminine! I could not forbear a smile as I inquired somewhat irrelevantly:

"My dear, did you ever get surfeited on sweetness?"

"Why, yes," she answered. "Once I had too much ice cream. It made me deathly ill. And now, I can't bear the sight of it."

"Just so," said I. "Hearken to my plan. If Bruce thinks Imo Berry is so sweet, why not surfeit him with Imo Berry? Invite her over here. Quote her. Take her everywhere you go. Mark my words, he'll get perfectly nauseated with Imo Berry."

"I'll begin right now," declared Meredith, a faint smile dimpling the corners of her mouth. "I'll call her up and invite her to dinner. Whatever any man can see in her! Why, her skin is muddy. It doesn't even look clean—kind of greasy-like."

"Then see," I admonished, "that you afford a contrast. Don't look all hot and fussed up. Maybe I'd better send Marie over. I can do very well without her one evening."

"You and Uncle Henry come over too," begged Meredith. "Let's make it a family affair. But, oh, say, don't breathe it to him. He'll tell Bruce. You know how men are. And you'll come, won't you? I need you to help me out. Maybe you can keep me from pulling out her hair or stabbing her."

I agreed, laughing, and wended my way home. I was still thinking of it when Henry came home for lunch. It did seem strange that Bruce, aesthetic, beauty-loving Bruce, should be enamoured of his plain stenographer. Still, there is no telling about these plain women. Some of them have kicked over thrones. I decided to probe around a bit and see how the land lay. With this laudable aim, I approached the subject by a flank movement.

"Henry," I inquired casually, "don't you think Miss Berry a very fascinating person?"

"About as fascinating," he replied guardedly, "as the common run of females."

This was, to say the least, evasive. A swift suspicion crossed my mind. What if Henry, too, were becoming victimized by this inscrutable Medusa? I tried another angle.

"How does it happen that Bruce Parrish spends so much time at the office?"

"Busy," returned Henry laconically.

"No doubt very busy," said I, "studying Miss Berry's various attractions."

"Ha," exclaimed Henry, wheeling suddenly, "sits the wind in that quarter? Miss Berry, eh? Well, I'm not looking for a second. Not thinking of passing off, I hope."

"If I did," I was goaded to reply, "you wouldn't care."

"On the contrary," assured Henry, "I would go quite mad. Though not mad enough," he added wickedly, "to marry again. But requiescat. Miss Berry as a charmer doesn't appeal to me. Too angular—too prim. I like 'em fat."

Henry knows that I am extremely sensitive anent my increasing avoirdupois. I deigned no reply but I can assure you that I was not disarmed in the least, by his ingenuousness. Rather, my suspicions were increased.

Meredith's dinner that night was, in more ways than one, a revelation. I had dined there before and eaten of delectable viands, with Meredith a distraught, fagged and scarlet-cheeked hostess. This time, however, as we went up the front walk, we were met by a vision in a cool, white gown, who appeared indifferent to heat, flies or possible tracks on the polished floors. Bruce and Miss Berry were already there, and you may be sure I kept my eyes open for any clandestine love making.

There was, in Bruce's frank, blue eyes, an inscrutable look. As for Miss Berry she was plainly ill at ease. She wore a stunning gown of rose linen which seemed to light up her sallow cheeks as with a reflected glow. Her dark eyes were curiously alight. I had to admit grudgingly, that she was really attractive.

But Meredith! The way that superb actress dragged Imo Berry into the conversation, was another proof of woman's designing arts. You would have thought she was a beloved sorority chum. It was, "Bruce, show Miss Berry the snapshots we took up in Maine," or "Why don't you put on some of the new records for Miss Berry?" Once, while I was supposed to be engrossed in Meredith's late magazines, and Miss Berry and Henry were looking through a kodak album—Henry wearing the martyred expression of a minister at a Ladies' Aid—I overheard Bruce and Meredith conversing in low tones.

"Isn't Miss Berry sweet, Bruce?" gushed Meredith.

"She'll pass," yawned Bruce indifferently. Ah, the duplicity of men!

"I just love rose linen," enthused Meredith. "And isn't her hair lovely—blue-black."

"What's eating you?" demanded Bruce. "Why all the superlatives? I can't say that I'm taken with the scenery, and as for hair—"

"Her soulful eyes!" raved his wife. "Was it Shakespeare or O. Henry that said, 'Stabbed with a white wench's black eye'?"

Bruce stared.

"The cocktail must have gone to your head," he muttered. "Is that Jane all you can talk about? What are you trying to throw her at my head for?"

I coughed discreetly by way of warning, and Meredith shrugged her shoulders and flitted away. But Bruce had not fooled me the tiniest bit. I have not lived with one of the guileless creatures for thirteen years for nothing. But really it was great acting. It had Mansfield beat or Eddie Foy.

When we broke up, Meredith insisted that Bruce take Miss Berry home although she was going our way, and roomed next door in the Martha Washington apartments. As Henry and I walked along at a respectful distance, I sounded Henry as to the enamorata.

"How old do you suppose Miss Berry is?" I inquired.

"I'll ask her," he rejoined. "Possibly over twenty-one."

"I wonder," I pursued, "if she ever had a love affair."

"Godfrey!" he exploded irritably. "Why are you so confoundedly interested in that spinster all of a sudden?"

Wouldn't you call that dissembling? In fact, Henry's tactics were only too obvious. I proceeded to come right out in the open.

"Henry Miller," I remarked severely, "Meredith and I are not so blind as we appear. You can't deny that there is some-

thing between Bruce Parrish and Imo Berry!"

"Great Horn Spoon!" bellowed Henry. "Parrish is not such a fool as to get tangled up in a skirt in this hen-pecked town. And as for Berry, a fellow might as well try to flirt with his maiden aunt!"

Such logic sounded plausible, but, with my usual acumen, I refused to be deceived. Marriage makes men experts in dissembling. I awaited with what calmness I could, the outcome. It really was surprising the way Meredith carried on. I didn't think it was in her. She changed utterly. A good colored girl was installed in the kitchen, and Meredith apparently developed into a social butterfly. She dropped into the office at all hours and carried off Bruce and Miss Berry. They dined together, supped and breakfasted. Wherever she dragged Bruce, there was Imo Berry like an avenging Nemesis.

And with it all, Meredith blossomed like a morning glory. She always did have the most artistic taste in clothes, and now she wore airy, fluffy, summery dresses with an air that set her apart strangely from the feminall-clad figure who used to wave a towel or apron over Bruce's head to ward off flies, as she admitted him. The excitement of the game and of the carefree life she led, acted like an elixir, and brought out a latent bloom. Where before, she had looked like a common house frow, now, she had changed into the dainty Meredith of the old days when Bruce first began courting her.

One evening, I strolled over, Henry having gone to the Rotary club, and, getting no answer to my knock, I seated myself in the porch swing to wait. I sat there for an hour, lost in thought, and it had grown quite dark, when finally I rose to leave. As I did I heard approaching footsteps, and before I could announce myself, I heard Meredith's fluty voice say:

"My, that was a tiresome dinner. Now that we're home, Bruce, I believe I will call up Miss Berry, and we'll play a game or so, and have some music."

"For Pete's sake!" came Bruce's heavy tones disgustedly. "Leave the old cat alone. Can't you find any other company in Westerville? Heaven knows I'm sick of the very sight of her. I despise her. If you think you're doing her a kindness you're mistaken. Treating her as you have like a social equal has made her act so cocky in the office that Henry and I have fired her—"

"Fired her!" echoed Meredith. "Really, Bruce? Then you are not—in love with her?"

"Well, I should SAY not," disclaimed Bruce. "As if I could love anybody but you, Meredith, you little siren you! You're simply adorable since you cut the drudgery stuff. If you'll just weed out that old party—"

"But—didn't she write you a love letter?" persisted Meredith. "I found one once when I was cleaning your coat."

"Not me. Must have been slipped in my pocket by mistake. Might have been intended for Henry."

I had heard enough. I determined to get to the bottom of this billet doux business while life and breath remained. Meredith and Bruce walked on into the house and I slipped away. I felt that my presence would be superfluous in that newly-found Eden.

When Henry returned at the usual late hour, I launched my bomb, oblivious of a box of chocolates he gave me.

"Henry Miller," I said, "you will please be so kind as to condescend to tell me who wrote that mushy letter that Meredith found in Bruce's pocket."

"Oh, that," grinned Henry. "Nell, I don't like to squeal on a pal—"

"But I insist," I put in coldly. "You are both trying to shift the blame."

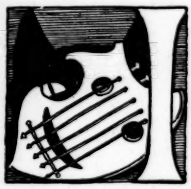
"Well, Nell—just between you and me—I'll let you in on a secret. But as you value Bruce's peace of mind, don't let it get to Meredith. The fact is, Bruce wrote that billet doux himself, just for a lark, and slipped it in his pocket by way of an eye opener. Some wag, that guy, believe me."

Well, really, are not the ways of men past finding out? As to the hypotenuse of this supposed triangle, Miss Berry, she is now stenographer for a clothing firm (everything in neckwear, socks and garters).

ONE NIGHT IN ST. ANDREWS

By HAPSBURG LIEBE

Believing that he is about to die, the Raffles of Vanishing City plans to restore $12,000 worth of loot to its rightful owners, and telephones for a priest.



IT is not every man that has the ability to select the right sort of assumed name. Neither Jones, Smith, nor Brown, nor yet Trevelyan nor Spotswoode, appealed to the Raffles of the Vanishing City. He called himself Leaf—George Leaf. He was slender, of medium height, dark of hair and eyes, and extremely fair-skinned; he was silent, grave, and he wore a perpetual air of slumberous laziness that stood him well in his nefarious occupation. As a matter of fact, however, he was about the biggest bundle of sheer nerves—not to say nerve—that ever came to St. Andrews, the Vanishing City, the city that is, in the winter months, and in the summertime is not. From which you will correctly conclude, of course, that "St. Andy" is away down South in the land of the pine and the palm, the 'gator and the moccasin.

Leaf had a single but comfortable room in the front of the third and upper story of the Little Hotel, a room that looked directly across the city's narrow central avenue and into the front of the Big Hotel. This was a vantage point, surely, worthy of consideration.

It was an hour after the fall of darkness, and the Vanishing City had robed itself more or less gloriously in preparation for another inning of social triumph and display. There was the soft and sad cry of a nightbird in the banana trees, the melancholy moaning of the Gulf wind among the palm fronds, the distant and low booming of the surf beyond the dim lines of lonesome Boca Toro. Leaf sat beside his open window, which was dark—it was not often that one saw a light in his apartment—and with eyes like those of a sailing osprey watched certain bejeweled women who had just entered the upstairs parlor of the Big Hotel. In his resourceful brain he was evolving a plan which, if carried out, would add a few more diamonds and a few more pearls to the hoard he kept nicely hidden under the floor in a corner of his clothes closet.

Then suddenly, George Leaf straightened in his chair and put both his thin and slender, white hands to the left side of his chest. His face was white.

"Heart again," he muttered, swallowing. "Too much supper. I've got to quit gorging like that, or I'm soon saying my last fond good-byes to this interesting little thing they call 'Life.' Life," he whispered, as an afterthought, "*is* an interesting little thing, though it's mostly tragedy."

Leaf professed to be an unbeliever, an infidel. But he wasn't.

Three minutes later he rose, half gasping, went to the phone, and called the clerk of the Little Hotel.

"Who," he asked, "is the best doctor in St. Andy?"

The answer came promptly. "Can't say. But there's one right here in the house now. Arrived this afternoon, from Chicago. Heart specialist. If it's anything like that, he's in room twenty-seven, second floor. Shall I call him for you, Mr. Leaf?"

"Thanks, no," said Leaf. "I—I'll just go down and see him."

Shortly afterward he was rapping lightly at twenty-seven, second floor. The door opened, and a big and round, florid, smooth-faced man confronted him somewhat sourly.

"Well?"

"Doctor?" Leaf asked.

"Doctor D. R. Janeson, at your service

sir; diseases of the heart. Am not down here to work, but to rest, though I'm willing to work, of course, to save life. Has yours anything to do with the heart?"

The other nodded, muttered his assumed name, and put out his hand. Dr. D. R. Janeson accepted the hand with more or less of warmth. "Come in," said Janeson, "sit down, and tell me about yourself."

Leaf walked in and sat down. Janeson, diseases of the heart, closed the door and within five more seconds had taken a chair facing his caller. Leaf gave a brief history of his ailment.

"Nervous, I see," said Janeson, when Leaf had finished. "And that's not good for you. Now Mr.—er, Leaf, there are several kinds of heart disease: the killing kinds, and the kinds brought on by such things as nerves and indigestion. I myself have the kind brought on by indigestion. I suffer horribly with it now and then—had an attack only last night. If you'll kindly remove your clothing from your waist up, Mr.—er, Leaf, I'll examine you."

Leaf rose and removed his clothing from his waist up, and Janeson rose and brought his stethoscope into action. After a short time that seemed next to interminable to Leaf, Janeson put the instrument into its case, and the two sat down again.

"Well?" said Leaf, and his voice betrayed anxiety.

"Mustn't smoke, musn't drink, musn't eat much, and musn't exert yourself at all; must on no account get excited," said Janeson. "You have both valvular and aortic trouble, and you're likely to see through the clouds at any minute. I wouldn't put it so brutally as that, Leaf, but it is very necessary to impress you with the importance of being careful with yourself."

Leaf stared. "And if I obey all your instructions, what then? How long—how long is it likely that I'll live?"

Janeson shook his head. "Impossible to say. Maybe a year, maybe a month, maybe a day; or, perhaps, only ten minutes. Sorry to have to tell you this, Leaf. If you've got any peace to make with the hereafter, better be doing it. It's a serious thing, Leaf, to die."

"To die," Leaf muttered to himself, "to die—"

After a moment, he rose unsteadily, seeming broken, and a century old. Janeson, too, went to his feet; he helped Leaf into the clothing he had taken off for the examination.

"Your charges, doctor?"

Janeson waved his hand. "I'm not practicing now. But at home, in Chicago, I get twenty-five dollars for work like this. If you care to—er, pay that, Leaf, you may just—er, you may—"

Leaf placed twenty-five dollars in banknotes on a nearby table, turned and walked slowly out of the room, closing the door softly behind him.

When he reached his apartment on the floor above, he did not make a light, which, of course, was nothing unusual for him. He groped, somehow stunned, over to his open window, and there sat down weakly. He heard the soft and sad cry of a nightbird in the banana trees, the melancholy moaning of the Gulf wind among the palm fronds, the distant and low booming of the surf beyond the dim lines of lonesome Boca Toro. He turned his eyes upward. The stars, bright as electric arcs, seemed almost near enough for his hands to reach, and beyond them stretched in beckoning and eternal mystery the limitless, velvety-blue bowl of space. For a few seconds he forgot death in the magic of that night.

But soon he thought of death again, and he wondered what it was, if there was anything that lay on the other side of it.

Then he knew that he was no infidel. There must be something, he told himself, something that created and kept everlasting vigil over all that magnificent and elaborate system of stars and suns and moons and planets. The trouble was, people measured the something wrongly. They measured the infinite by their poor little, puny yardsticks; they judged of God, and thought of God, and feared God, and imagined they loved God, all within their tiny, wormlike standards. He himself had thought of the Master, when he thought of Him at all, as a big and incessantly frowning Man in a flowing white

robe, with a long white beard. It was wrong. It was sacrilege. Not only that, it was sheer blasphemy! Enlightenment and civilization—it was to laugh! Hair-splitting creeds and ways of worshipping the Supreme Being—again it was to laugh!

And George Leaf did laugh, a low ripple that sounded tragic. Then he began to think more deeply of himself, and of his chances beyond the pale of death. He thought of the things he had done, and he was ashamed. When They asked him, there in the Beyond, what he had done, what would he tell Them? Would he be like Tomlinson, that immortal Tomlinson of Kipling's, out of place in both Heaven and Hell? He knew he couldn't lie to Them there. He would have to tell them that he was, and had been always, a professional thief!

For the first time in his misspent life, George Leaf knew as much of penitence as his soul could ever know. Then he sat up straight in his chair. He could undo a part of his sins, at least. He could return to its rightful owners something like twelve thousand dollars' worth of loot. And he would do it. If his heart would but last long enough, he would do it.

Leaf crept, like the thief he had been since he could remember, across the room and to his dresser. Silently he opened a drawer and took out a small electric flashlight. He went slowly and without a sound, the habit of years strong upon him, to his clothes closet, slipped inside, and shut the door on his heels.

He snapped on the flashlight, knelt, pried out a short piece of floorboard with his knife, and put in a hand. Another second, and he had taken from the hole a tiny black enameled box. He opened it, and the jewels twinkled even as the stars were twinkling in the vault of limitless space. Leaf ran a hand through them, for the moment forgetting, the old spirit of unlawful conquest uppermost in him, and smiled. It was his heart that brought him back. It fluttered like a wounded bird in the dust.

"Time!" Leaf begged there on his knees, his upturned face like chalk. "Give me a little more of life!"

Again his heart became normal in its action. He slipped quickly from the closet, drew the shades carefully, locked the door, and turned toward an electric switch-button on the wall; soon the room was flooded with a soft white glow. He sat himself down at a little table, and drew toward him paper and envelopes, pen, ink, and blotter.

Then he addressed fourteen envelopes to fourteen persons, most of whom were women, some of whom were even then guests at the Big Hotel across the avenue. This done, he wrote fourteen short letters, each exactly like the others, confessing everything and imploring, not only forgiveness, but prayers in his behalf!

The jewels went with the fourteen letters into the fourteen envelopes, exactly where they belonged, and the envelopes were carefully sealed. Leaf felt decidedly better over it. He rose from the table and thrust the heavy letters into his coat pocket. Again his heart fluttered like a wounded bird in the dust. It sent him staggering to the phone.

"All right, sir?" the voice came cheerily enough from below.

"Send me," said the weak and tremulous voice of George Leaf, "either a priest or a preacher—either a priest or a preacher—I think I'm dying—"

Barely five minutes later, there was a low but hasty rap at Leaf's door. Leaf unlocked and opened it, and in stepped a tall and serious faced, bearded man who wore glasses.

"Were you," the bearded man asked quickly, solicitously, "in need of a doctor?"

"My heart—" began the pale, sheer bundle of nerves that other people called George Leaf.

The doctor stepped to him and bent an ear to his chest. The ear listened for not much more than a minute. The doctor straightened, smiling.

"You're scared, man!" he exclaimed. "A little palpitation, that's all. Caused by eating, drinking, or smoking too much. Now if you had it like the fellow in twenty-seven, second floor, you'd have reason for

being scared. He just dropped dead from organic heart trouble; I left him to come to you. Professional crook, I understand, and posing as a physician. Janeson was his name, or assumed name... I'll see you to-morrow!"

The doctor was gone. Leaf smiled at the great discovery. Then a little, round man in black, all flushed from running up the two stairways, suddenly became framed in the doorway.

"Did you," he asked kindly, "wish the services of a priest?"

George Leaf's hand gripped tightly, greedily, wolfishly, a bundle of fourteen bulky envelopes in his right coat pocket. His eyes narrowed.

"Not me." His voice carried a sneering tone. "The man who wanted you is in twenty-seven, second floor. He's dead. What the devil do you think *I* would want with a priest?"

The Black Cat Club

THE GALLOWAY LOOP

This is the kind of story that writers like to read because it is well done technically. Its main virtue is that enviable economy of words and material that is so hard to attain. The author says just enough, never too much. His paragraphs are concise, yet adequate. They are good to look at, short and ornamented invitingly with punctuation marks. Especially gratifying, too, is the manner of presentation. The author has chosen the viewpoint, variously called, that is just a plain record of speech and action. There is no interpretation, no mind reading; just sense impressions such as we receive in life. This makes the story seem essentially real because it is like life, and because, as in life, we must form our conclusions for ourselves.

THE GALLOWAY LOOP is really a character story, but, since the author's method is to reveal character through action, readers who prefer action to character will still find it "a very good yarn." There are but three characters, and all are necessary to the plot. By emphasizing the physical traits of the three old prospectors they are differentiated enough to enable the reader to "keep them straight." One is tall, one large and one small; and each possesses the surface qualities usual to his personal type. But, when harassed by disappointment, discomfort and hunger, they are all reduced to the same fundamental characteristic, namely selfishness. Besides possessing the same inner nature they seem, unlike most fictional characters, to be of equal importance to the story. The impersonal angle of narration however has an almost imperceptible leaning toward Big Matt's viewpoint. Also, although he is not followed behind the scenes, he is constantly found on the stage. He is given the place of rhetorical emphasis—the first and last paragraphs. And he is the only one who is in any way changed at the end of the story, where he shows a change of front if not of heart. He might therefore be called the dominant character. His confession that he had lied about his ability to throw the Galloway Loop is inadequately motivated. So far he has not shown the least trace of humility. From what has been said of him, one would expect him to offer glib excuses, rather than brave Andy's contempt and anger.

The story's ending is amusingly unhappy. The old prospectors, in the final loss of their gold, receive a punishment commensurate with their selfishness. There is no compensation even for the long winter's hardships. Big Matt's humilating confession is unrewarded. But, after all, the situation had not been so serious. It was only near-starvation that they suffered. They still had dried peas, beans, molasses and "the makings" of biscuits. Also their isolation was not compulsory. They could have gone in to Five Troughs at any time, had they been willing to abandon their gold. —*Velma Van Nest Walder*

Big Matt Gunnison is a smooth, cheerful liar with a knack of making his lies sound truthful. His words and actions show this to be true, all through the story. A liar with a soothing belief in the rightfulness of so doing, he cleverly extricates himself from the job of washing dishes, shifts the blame for losing the bacon to other shoulders, puts the final straw on the load of discouragement which drives away Silver Ed Duke after he and Andy have found the lost gold, and then, when he fails to make his boasts come true, and they need Silver Ed to save the gold with

his Galloway Loop, gently rests the burden of his absence on weak, grumbling, pitiful Andy's shoulders.

In one light, Silver Ed is plainly what Big Matt calls him: "A gorged..... old sow-hog." But perhaps he is not. Living with Big Matt through those hungry, man-trying days was bound to bring to light to a man of Silver Ed's shrewdness the real qualities in him. Perhaps Silver Ed knew all the while that Big Matt was "bluffing" about the Galloway Loop. If he did, I cannot blame him for cheerfully gorging himself on the bacon while Big Matt went hungry.

But what about little, whining Andy Mullen? It seems to me that he is plainly a victim of fate, or circumstances. Why does he side with Big Matt? Silver Ed offers to give him a gamble on his share of bacon. Andy takes the gamble—on Big Matt. Evidently, he has all faith in Big Matt, and none in Silver Ed. In that case, I suppose it is fair for Silver Ed to gorge himself at Andy's expense.

—J. Leland Crawford

It is difficult to believe that anyone could have been so completely mean as to eat all that bacon under the quivering noses of his two partners, Matt and Andy, but that is what Silver Ed did when he won his bet by throwing the Galloway Loop, and we are almost wickedly glad when Big Matt starts him on his way to camp by a clever bit of acting, and he loses his chance to share in the secretly discovered pack. If the other two can only reach the ledge before the thaw sends the pack sliding into the abyss below! But Nemesis will have its way. Big Matt's already suspected duplicity proves his undoing. He never had been able to throw the Galloway Loop, and now Ed, with his despisable dexterity in throwing the lariat, is beyond their reach. To the very end Matt runs true to form, and tries to lay the blame on Andy for Ed's departure. The conclusion is a tragically just and sweeping retribution for thoroughgoing meanness; and yet we suffer a real pang of regret, which shows we have been enjoying a good story, when the pack slides slowly down past recovery.

—Mrs. John R. Powell

Every incident might have happened, except that one where the author overdraws his picture and makes a weak attempt at humor, in the following passage: "They had engaged in heated arguments as to whether a flea had hair; whether Baptists could exist in the Desert of Sahara; whether the skin of a Chinaman or the skin of a Piute Indian made the best razor strop." This is neither logical nor humorous, and seems to be the only point at which the story stretches the leashes of verisimilitude. *—Warren Eugene Crane*

THE EPISTLES TO TERRENCE

When I read THE EPISTLES TO TERRENCE I was reminded of a squirrel I saw once that had lost its tail. Although the squirrel seemed to be able to get about fairly well, one felt that something essential was lacking, and one was irritated by its absence. The same is true here. There is something lacking. We are led up through a long, almost long-winded, introduction; the story begins slowly to unfold itself, and then suddenly, in half a page, comes the conclusion. Somebody has chopped the tail off.

This is, however, only the apparent, and not the real fault. Since the story is there —as it undeniably is—it would be superfluous to tack on a proportionate tail. The trouble is with the form. Had it been a rabbit, instead of a squirrel, that had lost its tail, the latter's absence would not have been so noticeable. And had the story been told in a different way, the conclusion would not be felt too abrupt.

There is too much "loafing around" in the body of the story to justify so sudden an ending. The introduction, in so far as it describes Dan Dugald, may stand, and likewise the paragraph telling of the New Deal. The space devoted to Betty is perhaps not too long, since it is upon her that the story turns. Thereafter, however, the story is rather too slow. The scene at Kirby's might be hastened a little. But the worst part of the story is the long letter to the editor of the New Deal. There is too much information here. Betty would not write so long a communication, going into the subject so thoroughly. A much shorter letter, less business-like, and containing less elementary economic theory, would be more natural. Besides, the editor of the New Deal ought to know who and what Hoskins is, so that Betty need not include an essay on the gentleman's character. If the information is indispensible to the reader, let it be served up by some other method.

But aside from its mere lengthiness, the manner in which the story is told leads us to expect a hard-fought battle between the New Deal and the "boss" interests, with of course the traditional editor-and-boss's-daughter complications. The author has spared us that, giving instead a few words: Dan Dugald introducing his grandson. This ending, good in itself, becomes, when put at the end of the story as it is told, too abrupt to be pleasant.

—Henry L. Deimel Jr.

The reader becomes interested in the incidents centered around Dan Dugald, his daughter Betty, and Hoskins, the politician. Without any warning the author turns the attention of the reader to Kirby's store. It is not until this incident is more than half-way completed that one can see the connection it holds with the rest of the story. The interest of the reader becomes centered in this and then is suddenly diverted to a dingy newspaper office. The tension is raised to a high pitch—the reader smiling over the fact that a good setting has been laid—and then the story is brought to an abrupt ending. Nothing else could have been done for so short a story, but it seems to be incomplete. One would like to see the real conflict when the New Deal together with the populace clashed with the policitians and the business concerns. One would like to know how Dan Dugald, the main boss, was finally won over. It would seem that a man of his character would have disowned his daughter for having anything to do with such a character as Terrence O'Mahoney.

—*Leslie E. Dunkin*

The opening of this story was spoiled by an over abundance of explanatory matter. True, the matter was pertinent; but how much more effective if this setting, which was given about six hundred words, had been introduced, piece by piece, suggestively and subtly into the body of the narrative. The effect of this error was that it left the reader with no clear cut picture; it was a mere history. It occurred to me that the best place for the beginning of the story was the paragraph. "On a blistering day of August..." This paragraph was the best one in the story.

—*W. Y. McLeish*

There is a good yarn in THE EPISTLES TO TERRENCE, but the manner in which it is presented borders on the amateurish. By this I mean that the point of view is inconsistent. There are three points of view, and the reader is left in doubt from which the story is told, Dan Dugald's, Kirby's, or The New Deal's. There are no less than six different shifts between these, which tends to lose the reader's interest and confuse him. —*Theodore Pratt*

The December
BLACK CAT
will contain twenty stories or more and an important announcement.

THE NUMBERED NEMESIS

Fiction is a lie.

To be successful a lie must be a probable lie. To be a successful bit of fiction it must be an interesting lie.

THE NUMBERED NEMESIS fulfills the latter but not the former premise. It is lacking in verisimilitude. If you doubt it ask the bank clerk in a town large enough to boast of Shearson's gaming parlors, not to mention vague references to competitors. And we doubt if Emptybean Moneypenny would have noted the numbers on the bills in question.

But, pshaw, we grow hypercritical. The story is interesting and its denouement original. We find that great essential attribute of which O. Henry was such a practical exponent, namely surprise. What matter if it be furnished by the unusual spectacle of inherited wealth with brains! Perchance, all the greater surprise reasoned the author.

The story is interesting in spite of certain detracting factors outlined above. It has a touch of local color that may or may not be real, and it is well told. We would read another by the same author, and that is a fair criterion of merit.

HOLED THROUGH

A few years ago HOLED THROUGH would have been considered a ghost story. From a modern viewpoint, however, it may be termed an interesting exposition of the theory of the survival of personality after death.

Its chief cleverness lies in the free rein it gives one's fancy. We may or may not believe there was a ghost. It might just as easily have been fevered brain plus whiskey.

Tense action and reaction in this story are well placed against a homely and natural background, and the dog's death accentuates the as yet unseen terror, making the atmosphere more uncanny than it otherwise would have been.

While the sample of ore was probably placed on the shelf before John's death, and its fall upon the bottle might have been coincidence, we feel as though it was not. The old prohibitionist, with his rigid code of justice and his peculiarities, is as evident as though he were material.

The construction of the story is good and it exhibits a fine imagination. The revenge is unique and ghost or otherwise. John exacted his due to the last drop in the pound of flesh. —*Bessie Loesges*

The "OPEN DOOR" For WRITERS

The very authors whose stories are most in demand by magazine editors to-day started their careers by writing stories for the BLACK CAT. Among them are Jack London, Rupert Hughes, Alice Hegan Rice, Harry Stilwell Edwards, Will N. Harben, Geraldine Bonner, Sewell Ford, Holman Day, Cleveland Moffett, Juliet Wilbor Thompkins, Ellis Parker Butler, Susan Glaspell, and to mention some of the more recent arrivals among the top-notchers, James Francis Dwyer, Ida M. Evans, Hapsburg Liebe, William Hamilton Osborne, Willim J. Neidig and Octavus Roy Cohen.

There are new writers coming forward every day, and the BLACK CAT believes in being near the source of supply, in being almost *the* source of supply. It is always ready to publish the work of those who show promise, bases its judgment on merit alone, and gives the same consideration to the new writer that is given to the writer with an established reputation.

There is no better way to learn to write than by analyzing the work of other writers. Thus, it was to help the aspiring writer to a quicker understanding of short-story principles that the BLACK CAT CLUB was formed and made a regular feature of the magazine. The idea of the CLUB is simple: It offers the writer an opportunity to master technique by study and criticism of BLACK CAT stories. These criticisms are the writer's "finger exercises." Each month the best critical essays are published with the names of the authors, *and paid for at the rate of one cent per word.* Membership is open to all who subscribe to the magazine. Several members have had stories published in the BLACK CAT and other magazines since joining the CLUB. By studying stories that *have sold* you may learn to write stories that *will sell.*

Enroll to-day and send in your criticism of one or more stories in this number. Each criticism should be as nearly as possible in the form of a finished essay; it should be more than a synopsis, and must not exceed five hundred words. In preparing criticisms, write on one side of the paper only. The number of words in each criticism should be written at the top of the first sheet, together with the name and address of the author. Criticisms of stories in this number should be mailed to the BLACK CAT not later than December 10.

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